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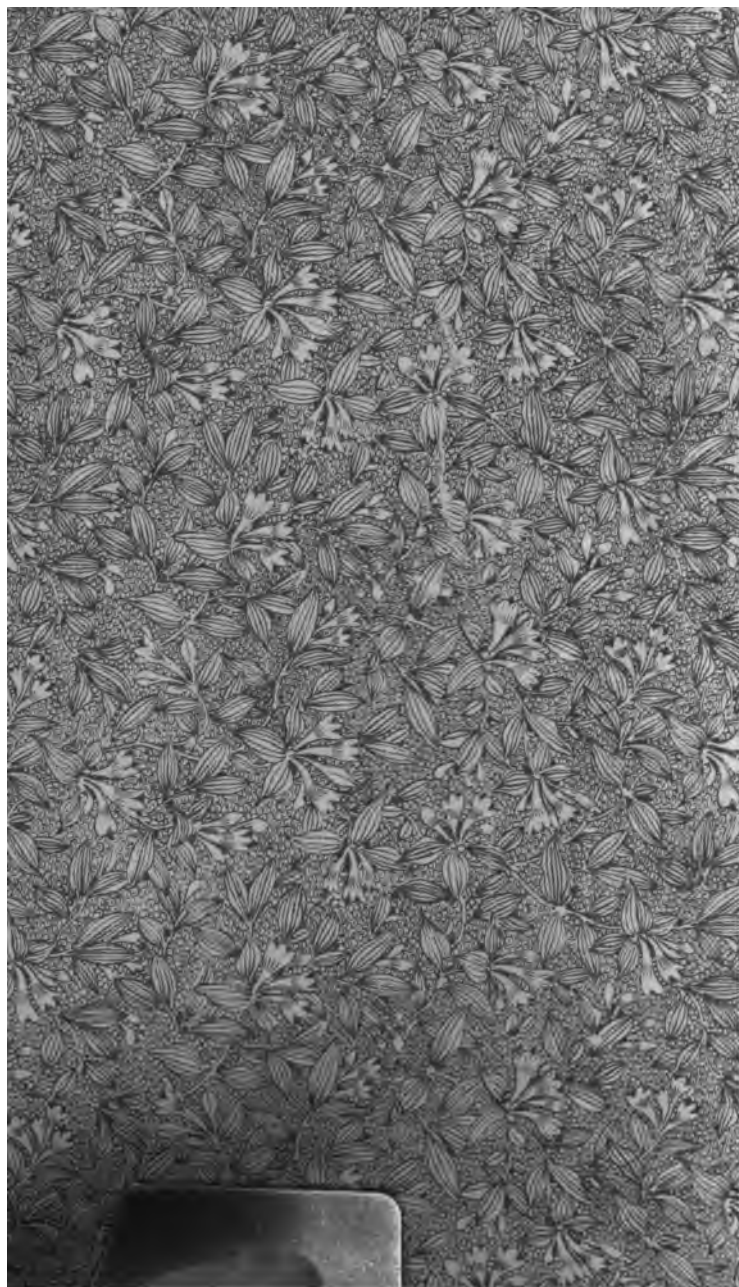
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LIKE

HIS OWN
DAUGHTER







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LIKE HIS OWN DAUGHTER.

LIKE HIS OWN DAUGHTER.

A Story.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"THE CHORISTER BROTHERS," "RUTHIESTON,"

ETC.

"Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say I'm growing old—but add
Jenny kissed me!"—LEIGH HUNT.

"Patient of pain tho' as quick as a sensitive plant to the touch ;
Hers was the prettiest prattle, it often moved me to tears ;
Hers was the gratefulest heart I have found in a child of her years."
TENNYSON.

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LIKE HIS OWN DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

NOVEMBER TERM.

THE "November term" in the north of Scotland is not usually a particularly cheerful time. It is associated, if not with the first snows, with heavy muddy roads and swollen streams and murky skies, bleak winds and bare brown hillsides: with flittings also and changes of home and service, with packed up "kists" and furniture-laden carts; with farewells to familiar scenes, and "new faces at the door."

The tall, still handsome, middle-aged woman who sat among her sable-clad children and funeral guests in the parlour of Craigendykes farm, bearing so bravely the weight of her forty-seven years with their manifold cares and toils, and as bravely, in outward composure, the far heavier burden of the widow's weeds donned for the first time that day, had no flitting before her. She

was mistress of Craigendykes still, for the better part of a nineteen-year lease, with two stout elder sons at home, and two dutiful elder daughters—to say nothing of three junior olive-branches. But which of all her sons and daughters—be he never so helpful, be she never so loving—could fill the void in her heart; could make up by one-tenth the loss of her faithful husband and companion of twenty-six years, who had that day made his last flitting; whose mortal part had been “sown in hope” in the little Episcopal churchyard of Glendinnie?

It had come upon her so unexpectedly. Only a fortnight ago the strong man had been going round his fields and doing his work like one who had at least a third of his life yet before him. A slight chill caught after a wet market-day, neglected at first, had struck inwardly, taken an inflammatory turn; remedies were unavailing; and after a few days of scarce-realized apprehension, Margaret Ledingham found herself a widow, with seven fatherless children.

She was a brave woman; and after the first crushing blow, she began to rally her forces and face the life before her. She did not wish her children's future to suffer. She and her eldest boy Sandy—who was turned one-and-twenty—could carry on the farm well enough with the help of Sammie Merchant, the foreman, who was “bidin’,” and had been three years with her husband. Her eldest girl Helen was nearly twenty, and had been educated for the profession of teaching; had passed sundry examinations, and was qualified to take

charge of a school. But vacant schools were not as plentiful as blackberries; least of all Episcopalian schools, such as Helen desiderated; so after waiting some time in vain, she had consented, as a sort of temporary measure, to accept the offered post of governess in the family of an uncle by marriage, who was the minister of an Established Church parish further north among the hills. This arrangement had been made shortly before her father's death, but his sudden illness and its termination had delayed her leaving for her new home at "the term" as fixed.

Jeanie, the second girl, who was eighteen, had not had her sister's elaborate education. She was a quiet homely active little lass, with not much beauty (of which her sister Helen possessed a large share), but a good deal of sound common sense and practical knowledge. She had no mind to stay at home, however, a useless dependent on her parents; for her next sister Lizzie was fourteen, and already a capable little helper to her active mother. There seemed nothing before Jeanie but some branch of domestic service, till another plan was started with regard to her, on this very afternoon of her father's funeral. It was while Margaret Ledingham was talking over some of her arrangements with her cousin Leslie Esslemont, the last to depart of the funeral guests, who had for the sake of "auld lang syne" rather come to the front now as her adviser and stay. He had imparted to her how he had for some time been looking for a nice lass, more

companion than servant, but a little of both, to attend on his little invalid daughter. "Ye see," he explained, "it's lonesome for her with me so much away; and my mother is growing a little deaf and doesn't like to lippen to herself to hear Katie at nights—and she would like some one in case of her having her bad turns. Now, if you think your Jeanie would like to try it, we would make what agreement you liked, and she should be treated in all respects like my own daughter. We keep a servant-lass to help in all the rough work, and yours would be principally kept to sewing, and to assist my mother." And after a little more bargaining as to details, the arrangement was made: Margaret feeling that it would be a happier, more homelike one for her little Jeanie to begin with, at all events, than a regular servant's place in a stranger's, if a higher, household.

This Leslie Esslemont was Margaret Ledingham's uncle's step-son—thus he was really no blood-relation: but the two families had been intimate formerly; and to Margaret, who had no brothers of her own, and but one sister, the little step-cousin had been almost as good as a younger brother—a pet and plaything, for there were ten years between them. By degrees the pet and plaything grew up into a sensible steady youth, a friend and adviser. Between him and Margaret's younger sister Elspet, who though a little the senior was much nearer his own age, the strong boy-and-girl friendship gave promise of ripening into

something deeper; which was, however, dispelled by Elspet, rather against the wish of her parents, choosing to marry a clever young Presbyterian schoolmaster, who seemed to have a distinguished future before him, and who had previously courted Margaret without success. Margaret's own marriage with another distant cousin, of the same family name as herself, and her removal thereupon to a different district of the county, had of course put a stop to the familiar intercourse of childish days; though Leslie had always remained upon a friendly footing with both her and her husband. Leslie himself had gone on and prospered in the mercantile career which he had chosen, and had for some time been at the head of a good grain business in the country town of Abermurchie, where he had settled. He had married, at five-and-twenty, the daughter of a tradesman of the place, and how he had married her at all was the wonder of most of his friends, for his wife was the very opposite of himself. Some went so far as to say he married her out of pity; and perhaps there was some shadow of truth in the idea. His was one of those large-hearted, tender-souled strong natures for whom anything small and weak seems to have a special attraction—and Kate Robbie fulfilled these conditions. She was a poor little delicate often-ailing thing, one of a large family, and not very happy in the circumstances of her home. She was a Presbyterian too, up to her marriage; whereas Leslie himself was as staunch an Episcopalian as any of the

Ledinghams. She loved him, however, and appreciated him as far as a nature like hers could appreciate his; and when after two brief years of married life, during which the poor girl had scarcely enjoyed a day's real health, she died in her confinement, he was well-nigh inconsolable. Indeed it seemed as though he would have succumbed altogether but for the frail pledge she had left him, the feebly-dawning life purchased at cost of her own.

By degrees, however, the young man's spirits regained something of their balance; and it became evident that the little daughter, to whom he had given her mother's name, began to some extent to fill the blank in his life, and to become the object upon which his love was concentrated. Little Katie was a winning child, fair of feature, and precocious and intelligent beyond her years; but she had been from the first a tender plant, and about her fifth year symptoms of hip-disease began to show themselves, developing so rapidly as in a short time to render her quite a cripple. Her father's one object in life was to make her happy, to obtain, if it might be, some cure for her malady; but all his love, and the skill lavished upon her regardless of expense, had hitherto only alleviated without removing the cause of the complaint, which the doctors assured him must be at best tedious and protracted. He had long since induced his mother, for the second time a widow, to make her home with him, and to "notice" his little Katie. It was to this

household, therefore, that Jeanie Ledingham was to be transplanted: Mr. Esslemont having promised her mother, on saying farewell that day, that he would return for her and escort her back in a week; by which time she would be well able to make all her needful preparations.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW HOME.

IT was a dull wintry-looking afternoon when Jeanie began her first journey from home. And it was in many ways a sorrowful parting. She was, as has been hinted, a homespun, quiet little girl, shy of new faces and surroundings, and shrinking into herself among strangers, though warm-hearted with those she loved. Though a passably pleasant-looking girl, she could never be reckoned a beauty. She had an intelligent fresh-coloured though not plump face; wise grey eyes, and plenty of hair of a light brown hue inclining to reddish—which hair was always brushed back very unpretendingly from her face, and smoothly but tightly braided behind. In figure she was of average height and build, neither slender nor stout. In short, Jeanie Ledingham was an ordinary girl in every sense of the word, and of a type often to be met with among her country-women.

She felt very forlorn and sad when she found herself in the train, with her cousin Leslie opposite to her.

She could almost have wished him anywhere else, though she felt that he had foregone the smoking-carriage out of regard for her unprotected condition. Though so old and intimate a friend of her mother's he was almost a stranger to her; for though he had occasionally been a guest at Craigendykes, he had only known the children as it were collectively. Margaret Ledingham had been always much tied to home with her large family, and had only on few and distant occasions paid a visit to Leslie's wife and his little child, though always much interested in hearing of little Katie.

Poor Jeanie had borne the parting as bravely as she could; both for her mother's sake and because she feared making a display in public. But as she sat and watched from the train-window the last old landmarks disappear, as they steamed along the pretty valley, she must have broken down altogether but for her shyness of the face opposite to her.

It was a comfortable face to look at though, as Jeanie now and then stole a glance upwards unperceived. The eyes were deep-set, penetrating but kindly, the features good if rather massive, framed in a border of brown hair, whisker and beard, shading through bronze almost to black around cheeks and mouth: judging by outward appearance you would say that the prevailing attributes of the man were strength—moral and physical—and good-nature. Leslie Esslemont had been held a "gey pretty chap" some ten or twelve

years ago; he was a good-looking man now, though the smooth brown hair was becoming scanty on the top of his head, and his figure was developing rather rapidly for his age. He was only seven-and-thirty, but his general appearance and manner made him in Jeanie's young eyes seem very mature indeed—almost as old as the father whom she had so recently lost.

He was very discreet, and did not embarrass her with conversation during the first part of their journey. They had to leave the train at the principal county town and wait an hour for one on another line, for Abermurchie. Leslie had plenty of business to fill up the time, but poor Jeanie had nothing to do but to betake herself to the somewhat dreary waiting-room.

It was growing dark when he came to summon her to the north train. When they had found places and seated themselves as before, he began to empty his great-coat pockets of sundry parcels and dispose them in the umbrella-net, saying as he did so: "Some commissions for my little lass. She's always needing some little thingie or other, when I go to the town, for her works—she's such a lot of fine works among her hands, you'd be surprised. Are you a great sewer?"

"I'm very fond of it," said Jeanie.

"Ah then, it's all right. You and Katie 'll agree fine. She's terribly needing some young person to assist her, and to enter, like, into her works. Mrs. Fyffe—that's our clergyman's lady—has been awfully kind, and taught her a number of pretty stitches. You see,

my mother's some old-fashioned, and doesn't care much for the fancy works. But you're sure to be able to help her."

"I shall try my very utmost, Mr. Esslemont," said Jeanie, in a sort of anxiety to propitiate her "master," as to a certain extent she felt Leslie to be.

"Cousin Leslie, if *you* please, Miss Jean Ledingham," he said, bending down to her, with a sort of twinkle in his eye. "I couldn't take 'Mr.' from one of Margaret Ledingham's bairns. And it's part of our compact, ye know, that you're to be like one of ourselves—like my own daughter, in short." Jeanie said nothing and he went on: "I'm sure I hope we'll make ye happy amongst us. I've no fears but my mother and you will get on fine." Poor Leslie had been wanting to say something of this sort all day, and only plucked up courage now, in the dark, as they were slackening for their own station.

"Oh yes," said Jeanie. "I mind upon Aunt Annie coming once to see my mother."

"You do? Ah—I remembered* you had never met. Well, it's all the better that ye're no strangers. Now here we are," and he began to re-pocket his parcels. "Have ye all your traps?"

Jeanie's "traps" consisted only of a modest black handbag, plaid and umbrella, with which she jumped out briskly on the dimly-lighted platform. "Now wait

* *remembered*—idiom for "fancied," or "was under the impression."

till I get a porter to bring along your box—my house is not minutes' walk."

Not five minutes, certainly, up one street, down another, and Leslie stopped at the door of one of a row of small houses in a quiet little thoroughfare, opened it with his latch-key, and led the way in.

Into a dark narrow passage; but on opening a door to the right, a glow of light and warmth burst upon Jeanie, as she found herself in a good-sized comfortable living-room, with a large window to the street, warmly and carefully curtained now. A bright fire burnt in the grate, and above the mantel-piece a gas-jet gave a brilliant light upon the room and its one occupant. On a pretty little sofa drawn near the fire and sheltered from any rude draughts by a folding-screen covered from top to bottom with a medley of bright-coloured pictures and scraps, lay a little girl of ten years, whom Jeanie, even at the first glance, thought the sweetest-looking little creature she had ever beheld—and indeed Katie Esslemont was a strikingly pretty child. Her fair hair, not long but very soft and thick, was cut short in the usual child-fashion across her brow, the rest of its luxuriance simply confined by a blue ribbon round her head. Her eyes were large and expressive, the colour real grey flecked with brown: Jeanie afterwards noticed that they were exactly the same in tint as her father's; but with their long curled lashes, set in the pale, rather shrunken, little face, their expression was peculiarly wistful and penetrat-

ing. Her features were small and delicate, with a look when in repose of melancholy sweetness—a pathetic blending of the child and woman. She was very thin, with the high shoulders and hollow chest of a child that has used crutches; but there was no actual deformity, though there was an appearance of unrest as well as helplessness in the small figure which was singularly touching.

She looked out with an eager little face of welcome as her father went up to her. It was pretty to see their meeting, though he had only been absent for a night; but to poor Jeanie, so newly-made fatherless, it brought a sudden pang as she watched the strong man bend down over his child's sofa, and kiss her so tenderly and stroke her hair, asking how she had been getting on, and if she had "thought long," and about her work—turning over a piece she had beside her with sundry "eh mys!" of wondering admiration.

"Yes; I'm all right, Dada," she said. "And have ye got the wools matched, and the fringe, and my beads?"

"Well, I think I've the wools and fringe all right, lassie, but I'm not so sure of the beads, though I tried two places—however, they're willing to take them back if they're not what ye're wanting. But see, here's your cousin Jeanie come home, and she'll be a heap more use to ye with your work than your stupid old Dada"—as he ended, turning and beckoning Jeanie forward. "She's some weary and cold-kind, I doubt, so ye'll do your best to make her at home, pettie. Give her a kissie," he added to Jeanie; "she's not frightened."

Jeanie needed no second bidding, and embraced her little cousin warmly. "I'm glad ye're come, Cousin Jeanie," said Katie.

"Ay, I believe ye're that," said her father. "And now I'll leave you two to make yerselves acquaint while I go and see what's come of Grannie."

"Sit down there, Cousin Jeanie," said Katie somewhat imperiously. "How's my cousin Margaret?"

It surprised Jeanie so much to hear her mother called "Cousin Margaret" by this chit, that at first she scarcely understood to whom she referred. "My mother is pretty well, thank you, dear."

"Dada talks about her," Katie said. "And you've a heap of brothers and sisters, I know. Tell me all about them. I ken their names. Tell me what they do."

"Well, there's Sandy, the eldest—he's to help my mother with the farm."

"And ye've another big sister, haven't ye?"

"Yes. She's at home—Helen; she's going in a little to stop with my Uncle Argo, and teach his children."

"Just that," said Katie, meditatively. "And what all are the others?—there's some littlins, isn't there?"

"Yes; two. Next to Helen comes Peter—he's at home just now, but he's a place to go to, in a shop at Stralogie; and then—then *I* come; and next my sister Lizzie, who goes to school, and helps my mother at home: and James, he's ten, and the baby, he's only four. We lost two—they were between Jemmie and

little Leslie. I think *he* was named after—" Jeanie hesitated a little—" after your papa."

"After *my* old Dada," said Katie, condescendingly. "*That's* what we call him."

"Ye love to sew?" said Jeanie, presently taking up a gorgeous pattern of crewel work just commenced which lay on Katie's sofa. "Is this your work?"

"Yes. Can you work crewel—and bead-fringe—and lace?"

"I can crochet a little—I never tried the crewel work."

"*I* can do point-lace," said the child, rummaging in a capacious work-bag that lay beside her. "Look, this is my sampler; Mrs. Fyffe is teachin' me the stitches, and she says when I do it quite well I may make a piece for the church. *Our* church, ye know," she went on. "I've been there. I used to go with Dada when I was a *little* girl, and could go upon my feet. I can't run now, ye know—not even upo' my crutches"—she shook her little head pathetically. "But I'll run again one day, if I'm good and patient, Dada says."

"What Church are you?" she asked presently abruptly. "*Our* Church?" and as Jeanie nodded assent, "*I remembered* you was Established. Grannie Robbie, and Uncle Jock, and them, all goes to the Established, but Dada and Grannie here and *me*, are Mr. Fyffe's people."

"Are ye looking at my screen? It's a bonnie one, isn't it? Mrs. Fyffe and Miss Spence and Dada got me the scraps, and I cut them out, and Grannie put them on. I'm gathering scraps now for a big, big album,

and when it's done Mrs. Fyffe's to put it away to the Children's Hospital for the little girlyies that's lyin' like me."

Little Katie's communicative chatter was here interrupted by the entrance of Leslie and his mother. Mrs. Peter Ledingham, Jeanie's great-aunt, was a brisk pleasant-faced little old lady, with cheeks like mellow apples, remarkably keen dark eyes, and fair hair scarcely streaked with grey. She was quick in her movements, and had a somewhat short, brusque way of speaking. There was no lack of warmth, however, in her greeting of her grandniece, as she kissed Jeanie and patted her shoulder, saying: "Eh my dear, my poor dear, I am glad to see ye! I'm disapp'inted I wasna in the way when ye came in. I was just ben the kitchen—but my hearin's nae so good as it once was, and Leslie and you slipped in so quiet, I never knew. Well, and now tell me hoo did ye leave them all at the farm?—and yer poor dear mother! She's keepin' up fine, Leslie says. I wat she's a good woman; she'd keep up herself for the sake o' them that's dependin' on her."

"My mother's wonderfully well, thanks, Aunt Annie. She bid me bring you her love."

"Ay, ay. Poor dear Margaret," said the old lady, with a tearful sniff. "And to think that this is the bit lassockie I mind on, five year ago, grown such a fine, stoot young woman! Well, but ye're surely tired—and yon little puss hasna so much as bidden ye put off yer ulster! Come awa' with me, my dear, and I'll

show ye your roomie, and where ye'll put down your things, before tea."

Aunt Annie led Jeanie up the narrow stair, at the head of which were two attic-doors. The room allotted to Jeanie was snug enough, with a good window in the sloping roof, and a clean, comfortable wall-bed. "We thought ye'd like best to be up here," the old lady said. "There's nobody in the opposite attic—we just keep orra* things there. Ye see I sleep aside Katie in the low room—and Leslie has the little roomie off it—he doesna like to be out of hearin' o' Katie, since her last bad turn."

"Eh, what a lovely child she is, Aunt Annie!" cried Jeanie in a sudden burst of pent-up enthusiasm. "I had no idea, till I saw her. There's something so sweet about her!"

"Ay, she's a dear pettie—and real good, when ye think of what she's come through."

"I hope she doesn't suffer very much?"

Aunt Annie shook her head. "'Deed does she, poor lammie, at a time—ye'd be sorry for her. She's been better this while. She's been terrible bad wi' her hip j'intie, ye know, but it's nearly whole now, and the doctor thinks may be she'll walk gin a while—but I dinna know. I've seen her sometimes, greetin' on whole nights wi' pain, and not knowing what way to get rest to her poor little beenies" (bones), "till I've felt I could ha' thanked God gin I had her to streek" (lay

* 'orra'—odd, miscellaneous.

out) "or' the morn; but ye see it's His good pleasure to lay it upon her, and she mun just bide her time."

"But she will grow better surely—and grow out of it?—she's so young," said Jeanie earnestly.

Again the old woman shook her head. "I dinna think it, my dear. I dinna think she'll ever grow better. I'm not willin' to say what I think to her father—he's so set upon her; ye'd think there wasn't a creature in the world but his little Katie; but he'll not rear her. Yon bone disease is a nasty trouble; if it heals in one place as like as no it breaks out in another. I've seen it before—not wi' my own, I wish I may be thankful!—they all had whole skins and healthy constitutions—but wi' some that I've known. And her mother was just such a poor thing, ye ken—always wi' some trouble or another. I was real disappointed when my son married her; but ye see, we canna order a'thing as we like. Well, my dear, I don't know what's making me speak to ye of these things. Hist ye and put past yer traps and come down to tea—I'm sure ye're needin' it."

What a cosy comfortable affair that tea-meal was, in the warm, brightly-lighted room! but even the cheerfulness brought home painfully to poor Jeanie the thought of the other fireside gathering, at the same hour, in the farm-house—where the father's chair would be vacant for evermore.

Tea being discussed and cleared away, the three drew round "into the fire" for a warm and a chat before

their early breaking-up. When Leslie had lighted his pipe and his mother taken up her knitting she began addressing him, in a somewhat confidential tone: "Mrs. Robbie was here the streen,* needin' to speak to ye—about Jock."

"What about Jock?" said Leslie, laconically.

"Well, ye know, Jock's home. And he's wantin' something to do. And I think he's ill about" (desirous of) "gettin' into Sandy Steven's berth."

Leslie gave a low whistle. "Does he think he's fit for Sandy Steven's berth?"

"Well, I dinna know. I told her I didn't know, and that he would need to speak to yourself. I did think, in my own mind, that he be't to think shame of seekin' aught more fro' ye, after all come and gone—but there's some folks disna know the word shame, and my oping-yan is, Jock Robbie's one o' them."

Leslie puffed away silently for some time, and at last removed his pipe to say: "Well, he may speak to me, but it doesn't follow that he'll get what he's seekin'. I doubt if he would ken bere from barley."

"Well, any way Mrs. Robbie's very much set upon it," his mother said. "She thinks bein' wi' *you*, ye know, would be a help to him—keep him straicht, and so on."

"Eh! how am I to keep him straight when he's travelling?" quoth Leslie. "My keeping straight would likely be to give him his discharge at the end of a month!"

* The streen or yestreen—yesterday.

The mother and son chatted on for some time longer. Jeanie sat for the most part a silent listener, addressing sometimes a few whispered words to little Katie, beside whom she was sitting. She was not sorry when bedtime came. Leslie Esslemont always ended the day by reading a few verses from the Bible, and a short prayer, to his little household; and this to Jeanie, accustomed to like religious habits, seemed a comforting and soothing conclusion to a somewhat trying and fatiguing day. Then he wished Katie a tender loving good-night (reminding Jeanie not a little of her own father's ways with the "littlins"), and her grandmother carried her to her pretty light iron bed behind her favourite screen—the old lady's own neat white-curtained resting-place, according to their homely arrangements, occupying one wall of the room; and Jeanie betook herself to her attic, being young enough and weary enough to fall into a sound sweet sleep as soon as her head was fairly on the pillow.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE JOCK.

JEANIE was up early next morning. It was an early household: no lazy ways were countenanced there. Little Mrs. Peter Ledingham was up and stirring at six o'clock summer and winter; and the "servant lassie," who occupied a box-bed in the kitchen, had little chance to "sleep in." Jeanie, being a stirring young woman both by nature and education, lost no time in falling into her place and work as her great-aunt's general helper, and Aunt Annie commended her "smartness" quite warmly when they sat down to the eight o'clock breakfast.

Little Katie of course was an exception to the general early rising, and was not "lifted," as her grandmother said, till the day was well on. She took her breakfast in bed; waited on like a young princess by her devoted parent. It was the time when he chiefly saw her in the morning, as he went to his office at nine, and often did not come home till evening, except sometimes to a short meal in the middle of the day. Jeanie's

first impression of admiration for her little invalid cousin did not lessen on a closer acquaintance; on the contrary, the more she saw of her the more she was struck with Katie's brightness and patience: without any affectation of "goodness" there was something very touching in her way of accepting, with a child's unconscious light-heartedness and as a matter of course, much that was hard and painful and trying in her lot. She was naturally a lively, busy child, and one to whom the state of helplessness to which she was condemned it would seem must be especially trying: yet she never complained. She was full of occupation; either with her sewing, cutting out, or reading—she had an insatiable appetite for story-books. Yet there were times, Jeanie would notice, when the little hands were laid down as if wearied, and the fair head leant back among the pillows, with that look of patient sadness on the young face which made it seem to belong to a grown woman.

The liking between the two cousins seemed mutual: fortunately Katie took at once to her new companion, without any shyness, and seemed perfectly willing to allow Jeanie to perform any of the little offices for her which had hitherto devolved on Grannie. Wherefore on this very first afternoon, Mrs. Ledingham having some little marketings to do (which she always liked doing herself) felt quite comfortable in leaving Jeanie in sole charge of her darling: Katie with her new piece of crewel work for which her father had just brought

her the needful wools, and Jeanie with a great basket of miscellaneous sewing and mending, beside her sofa.

"It's so nice to have ye sit and sew aside me," Katie said. "Before, when Grannie was out or busy, I'd aye to sit my lone or just with Baubie—and I don't care for Baubie. Now I shall have you *steady*."

They had so sat together for a short time, when as Jeanie had momentarily gone behind the screen to look for some piece of work which Katie wanted there was a tap at the inner door, and a young man's head looked in. "Hey, Katie! all your lone?"—then as Jeanie came into view again, "O, beg yer pardon!"

"Uncle Jock! Uncle Jock!" cried Katie with a face radiant with glee, and looking as if she were going to spring off her couch. "Come in; come your ways in! It's only my cousin Jeanie Ledingham that's stoppin' wi' me—come!"

Thus encouraged, the new-comer entered the room. He was a youth of about two-and-twenty, small of stature, slight and slim, and something in the delicate cast of his features recalled Katie's own. He had fair hair and blue eyes, and a faint line of down on his upper lip; he was dressed with a certain dapper precision which showed that he was not unheeding of his personal appearance.

He bowed slightly to Jeanie, as he went up and kissed Katie with the easy familiarity of a near relation. "Yer father in, Katie?" was his first question.

"No; and he'll not be in or tea, so ye'll just stop and

play to me and Jeanie till he comes. Ye've brought the flutie, *good* Jockie-boy!"

"Well, I've brought her," said the young man, drawing a flute from the inside of his coat, "just case be ye might have been seeking a tune the first time of me being back—but I doubt ye're better occupied," looking at Jeanie: a look which, though hardly a bold one, Jeanie felt scanned her rather curiously from head to foot.

"Oh no, no, no," cried the child! "I'm *sure* Jeanie's for a tune—are ye not? This is my own Uncle Jock, ye know, and he plays so beautiful! Hist ye, and play, now."

"My music, Miss Jean Ledingham (I believe?)—my music is not of that superior description that I would be very willin' to parade it before you, but it pleases my little niece, for want of better—so, if ye'll excuse us, I'll try a bar or two." And as Jeanie smiled assent, he put the flute to his lips and began that most pathetic among the pathetic old Scottish airs—"The flowers of the forest." Jeanie appreciated music; and as the "tune" was followed by another and another, eagerly demanded by Katie, whose thin but sweet little voice not unfrequently joined in the strains which were most familiar to her, she became almost as much interested as the child herself.

They were interrupted at length by the return of Grannie, with her well-laden marketing-basket on her arm.

"So, John Robbie, ye're soon home again this time," was her rather short greeting of the visitor.

"Just that, Mrs. Ledingham," the somewhat cool response. "Hope I see you well;" and as Grannie was either unconsciously or wilfully deaf to the enquiry, he continued: "Yes; I'm not sorry to be back again. I don't like the town, and the town doesna like me."

"Ye havena given it a long trial, whatever," said the old lady.

"Go on, go on with the 'Bonnie House of Airlie,'" said Katie, who did not relish the interruption to a favourite tune. "Grannie, ye must let him finish."

"Oh ay, he's welcome to finish for me," said Grannie as she bustled about the room. "Only it's just a wonder to me how any young lad can thole to spend his time hour after hour at yon flutin', the way that he does," she added in a sort of aside to herself.

"The worst of it is, it's drouthy work," said John Robbie, after he had finished the air by Katie's order. "No, Katie, I reelly cannot go on. My thro't's just as dry as a board."

"Ye'll get a sup tea to m'isten it in a while," said Mrs. Ledingham, for whose special benefit the last remark had been emphatically pronounced.

"Don't put yourself about, mistress, pray; I'd as soon have a mug of beer, if it's the same to you, and a good deal sooner."

Mrs. Ledingham acceded to his request not without some inaudible grumblings as she went to fetch it,

before proceeding to "mask" her own and Katie's tea.

He drank it off with much goodwill; and then fell to bantering Katie about her various works. Katie took it all at first in very good part; but when he began teasing her about her sunflower, saying that "it resembled no airthly flower that ever grew, and was far liker the representation of a house on fire," it became so serious that Jeanie feared the little girl was going to cry, and was thankful when Leslie made his appearance in the early "gloaming."

John Robbie buttonholed him at once, and would have drawn him outside, but Grannie said: "If ye're needing to speak ye'll get the room to yersel's. Jeanie and me has our work ben the kitchen, and ye know Katie winna carry clypes" (tales). Jeanie understood at once and followed her aunt into the kitchen. "He'd hae had him out standing havering this half hour—and the tea growing cold waitin' him. Ye ken who it is?" Mrs. Ledingham added. "Leslie's good-brother."

"Katie told me he was her uncle. What is he to trade?"

"Well, my dear, he's just a rollin' steen—that's what Jock Robbie is," answered Grannie. "He's been in half-a-dizzen o' situations and disna keep none o' them—always comes back again to be a plague to Leslie, and a drag upon his poor crater of a mother."

"Is he her only son?" asked Jeanie.

"Hoot! she's three sons up and out in the world, but it's little use they are to her. The oldest has been

in America this five year, and she's aye cryin' that he never notices her, though he's done well, and married a girl wi' money. The second had a bit farm, here-awa'—some while back; but he was terrible for likin' a dram, and he got into difficulties and went bankrupt. Leslie had lent him money more than once—and not one penny of it did he ever see again: but the man went away and set up wi' some sort o' a mairchan's shop, far fro' this—and I suppose they be to be gettin' on some wye, as we hav'n't got word o' them this while. The neist has a situation some wye near Stirling: but it's little assistance the mother gets fra any o' them."

"Poor thing!" said Jeanie with sincere compassion, as she thought of her own steady industrious brothers, and their united devotion above all things to their mother.

"Ay—ye may say so. There's anither dauchter, too, ye ken—a lame lass, wi' some sort of a trouble like our Katie's—but she goes upon twa sticks, and keeps herself, partly, by white seam. They're a fusionless set, the Robbies, and always were. It's just the one p'int ever on which I disagreed with my son, the way he lets them get over him, and keeps on helpin' them that should help themselves. For why, because he'd married that poor sharger,* Kate Robbie, he should be supposed to go on keepin' a' her faimily, as good as, all his life, I canna see! But it's no use my speakin', so I just haud my tongue."

* 'sharger'—one who is stunted, ill-nurtured.

"Was Katie's mother any like herself?" Jeanie asked. "I've so often wondered."

"Like her? Na; she wasna bonnie like little Katie—Katie favours her father rather."

"She'd surely been a douce-like sort of a woman, I'm thinkin', Aunt Annie?"

"Well, may be she was that. She was the oldest dauchter, and I winna say but she was the best o' the lot. She was terrible quiet-kind, and had a genteel sort o' a look about her, and a quiet tongue; ye'd easy see she was one would never speak back to any. But she was aye so deylicat, ye know. She was lying on her back months before Katie was born, and not able to put her hand till a thing about her house, and what way Leslie wrought on wi' her I often wondered. I wasna here then, ye know. But I was over now and again to see them, and awat there's few young men, or old either, could ha' been what he was to her."

"I believe he'd been good to her," Jeanie said. "And did she die then, when Katie was born?"

"Ay did she—the very same day. I've heard she never looked up, or spoke any after. I was sorry for the poor young thing, and she nae one-and-twenty when she died."

Jeanie's ready tears stood in her eyes as she thought, with a girl's wondering sympathy, of this girl-wife and mother, so little older than herself, who had suffered so much, and died ere she had tasted the full joy of her married life.

Jeanie did not so much consider, girl-like—or rather child-like, for she was a child in many ways yet—her cousin's sorrow: he seemed so much older, quite beyond the range of her sympathy. He looked so cheerful too, and was always so calm and equable: one would not have thought he had passed through such a crushing trial.

"Leslie was terribly cut up about it," Grannie went on. "I think poor Kate had asked him or she died to be good to her mother and them. *She* wasna a widdy then, nor for a while after, and it wasna so bad: but since the father died and they were left more to themselves, they've aye been a bother, first one and then another o' them—and seem to think he's nothin' ado with his money, but help them. Of course I'm well aware he's plenty, and a real thrivin' business, as it's likely it would be wi' a head like himsel'," said the mother with pardonable pride: "but I'm just frightened if he takes any o' that Robbies into the office that he'll hae trouble wi' them. But as I said he knows best himself, and it's no use me sayin'—" here Jeanie laid her hand on the old lady's arm, for Leslie himself looked in with "Have ye got any tea for us, mother?"

"Ay have I," she replied, not in the least disconcerted. Neither she nor Jeanie had been idle while they were talking; and the tea was soon spread.

The visitor remained to it, and was a lively element in the party. His spirits seemed to have risen considerably since his interview with his brother-in-law.

He cracked jokes with him and Katie, made civil speeches to Jeanie, and appeared totally indifferent to the short and unceremonious manner of Mrs. Ledingham.

"Well, poor lad, he's happy enough now," Leslie observed, when at last John Robbie had taken his departure. "Remains to be seen how long it will last."

"How have ye settled it?" asked his mother. "Is he gettin' the place?"

"Not Steven's. But I've arranged to let him have the book-keeping, in the mean time—and am giving the travelling to Shand. I'd half promised it to Shand, as it was—forbye that Jock's not fit for it."

"And is he fit for the other?"

"Well, I shall look after him pretty closely, and he knows it. He's better at figures than anything. Yes; I think he'll do."

"Well, Leslie, I'm sure I hope it, and that ye winna lose by takin' him on. Any way, I know one woman's hert that will be eased the night—an' that's Mary Robbie's!"

CHAPTER IV.

ELSIE AND MISSIE, AND THE MINISTER OF
KESSACHIE.

IT is time that we glanced for a little at the fortunes of Jeanie's elder sister, whose leavetaking of home took place but a week later.

There was no travelling-companion for her as there had been for Jeanie. Her brother Peter was going to his situation the same day; but he had to leave the train only a few stations from that whence they started. Helen, however, had been a good deal away at school, and was quite accustomed to take short railway-trips alone: so that it was not such an adventure to her as it would have been to her younger sister.

Helen Ledingham was a great contrast to Jeanie in appearance, and few seeing them together would have taken them for sisters. Jeanie's fair, almost red, hair and sanguine complexion were derived from her father's side of the family; whereas in most things Helen "favoured" her mother. Margaret Ledingham had been celebrated once as a rustic beauty, and was

still handsome, but in some points her eldest daughter even surpassed her. Helen was tall, with a fine figure, and moved with a stateliness that was the more striking that it was entirely unconscious. Her soft almost black hair was smoothly brushed back from a forehead as faultlessly moulded as a Grecian statue; and if the other features were not so entirely statuesque, they were still delicately chiselled and harmonious. Her eyebrows were very dark and rather broad, but finely shaped; her eyes were light grey, but the length and blackness of the long up-curved lashes made them appear dark. In complexion she was pale, almost to sallowness, and seldom changed colour, whereas little Jeanie's face flushed deeply at any changing emotion. With all her advantages of face and figure Helen was not, outwardly at least, a vain girl. Her dress was always quiet and sensible; and her fine black hair was arrayed as simply as Jeanie's—partly in deference to her father hitherto, he having abhorred, as most people of a former generation do, the modern style of fringes and frizzles. Honest little Jeanie loved and admired her pretty sister with all her heart, looking up to her as immeasurably superior in every way to herself, but whether this superiority was really so great as she believed it to be, perhaps my readers may be inclined to doubt.

Helen had the same route to follow as her sister's had been to reach her destination, but as the station for which she was bound was further up the line than

Abermurchie, and she had some distance to go on leaving it, she had started by the first train. Thus it was early in the afternoon when she passed Abermurchie. Jeanie, having been advised of the hour, was at the station to see her; looking so well and bright after her week of change of scene and fresh interests, that Helen felt sure her lines had fallen in pleasant places.

There were but a few minutes for Jeanie to pour out her eager inquiries for mother and all at home. Yes; they were all fairly well.

"And how are you, Jeanie?—you look well."

"Eh yes, I'm real comfortable—and oh! I *do* wish you could see our Katie!"

"Yes? And how do you get on with Aunt Peter—or whatever she's called?"

"Aunt Annie! Oh, fine—she terribly kind to me—and so's my cousin, but I don't see much of him."

"And when are you going to get out of your *terrible* Doric, I wonder!" said Helen. She rather prided herself on "speaking very well"—though unknown to herself she had a strong accent—and would often find fault with Jeanie's more homely tongue. "I suppose the Auntie is a regular old-fashioned boddie!"

"She's a real nice boddie, any way," said Jeanie, "and I feel quite at my ease, ye know—oh, here's the guard!—good-bye, dear, dear Nellie; I do hope ye'll be happy." And with one last squeeze of the hand the sisters had to part: little Jeanie watching the receding train, but Helen had leant back in her compartment composedly.

"It seems a happy arrangement for the child," she thought to herself; "and I dare say in a little town like that it is pretty cheerful, which is more than I expect Kessachie will be!"

When the train stopped at the little station for which Helen was booked, she looked out anxiously for some sign of a conveyance, as she knew her destination was three miles from the railway; but seeing only a common "long cart" outside, she began to feel almost as if she had made a mistake, and applied rather anxiously to the station-master:

"Please, is there any one for me—Miss Ledingham—from Manse of Kessachie?"

The station-master looked at the tall, handsome young lady for a moment in some curiosity. He was rather a peculiar-looking man himself, thin and dark, with a solemn long face. "Miss Ledingham is it?" he said in slow, grave tones. "Eh ay, then, there's a lassie from Manse o' Kessachie—she's waiting outside, wi' a shalt*—and I was bidden say the cairrier was to bring on yer box."

Helen went through the little gate, unconscious of Mr. Andrew Grant's grave remark to his subordinate that "yon was a right bonnie lass for Manse of Kessachie." And there behind the building was a fresh-faced fair girl of fourteen, in a rough cloth jacket and wincey skirt, holding a long-legged raw-boned brown pony with a side-saddle on.

* pony.

"Cousin Helen?" she said. "How are ye? I'm Elsie, ye know, and papa bid me say he was so sorry he was not able to get a gig to meet ye to-day because it's a market—but the carrier will bring your box, and I've brought Missie, if you please to ride."

Helen looked down at her brand-new crape-covered black skirt, made in the prevailing narrowness of the fashion, and then at the muddy pony, with some hesitation.

"Ye're not frightened to ride?" said Elsie Argo. "Missie's quiet enough, and I'll not leave hold of the ring of the snaffle."

"No, I'm not frightened, but I'm afraid my dress won't let me ride," said Helen.

"No? I've the riding-skirt," said Elsie, beginning to divest herself of the article with great good will: but Helen still obstinately shook her head. "I think I'll just walk," she said.

"But the roads are awfully dubby—and it's a good bit. I never thought of ye walking."

"It's a pity," said Helen with the slightest bend of her dark brows; "but you can't help it, my dear. I'm not willing to destroy my crape—so you just jump up again and lead on."

So Elsie dragged her steed to the bank at the roadside, scrambled on, and started, with her cousin walking beside her.

"I'm so glad ye're to come and give us our lessons, Cousin Helen," Elsie began eagerly. "I shall be able to carry on my French and music."

"Are you commenced to French and music?"

"Yes; Maggie and I went to classes in town in the spring; but we had to stop, and since that we've been taking our lessons with Mr. Rainnie at the village school; and of course he hasn't those branches, and I would like most particularly to excel in music."

Helen looked up with some amusement at the eager face and the red ungloved hand holding the reins.

Although a vigorous walker, she found it rather tiring picking her way through the "awfully dubby," stony roads at the pace of Missie's quick shambling steps, and felt quite thankful when they at last drew near something like a village. Elsie pointed out "our church"—an unpretentious building with an old-fashioned bell-turret—and nearly opposite the church-yard-gate turned her pony, or rather the pony turned itself, with quickened steps, in at an open iron gate, up a prettily laid out, but now unswept, unraked, and leaf-strewn little avenue, leading to the manse. Near the end of this avenue a figure now appeared standing in the middle—the figure of a large coarse-looking man, in rusty black garments, who thus saluted the arrivals in a broad nasal accent:

"Eh! *whatten* a sight do I behold? Miss Argo mounted, and Miss Ledingham plodding it on foot through the mire at her pony's tail! Miss Argo, Miss Argo, *where* are your manners?"

Helen looked in a little surprise as well as amusement at the speaker. He was a man of about forty-

five: his seedy-looking black broad-cloth garments hung in an ill-fitting loose way upon an ungainly figure; his face might have been passably good-looking in early youth, but there was an expression of low cunning and satire about the large coarse mouth and cold blue eyes, and the other features were hardened in proportion. His hair, which he wore rather long, was of the colour and appearance of chopped straw, and was plastered down upon his head, at this moment destitute of other covering.

Helen had not seen her uncle, the Reverend Adam Argo, for many years, except recently at her father's funeral; and on that occasion he had turned out so sleek and black and irreproachably ministerial, that she scarcely recognized him in this unkempt, unwashed-looking individual, innocent of neckcloth, and with coat-sleeves and trowser-ends turned up as if he had been digging.

He put both his hands on her shoulders, and saluted her with a kiss. "Welcome, my dear niece, to the Manse of Kessachie! but pray say to me what way it is that you arrive on foot, when the pony was sent for ye?"

"I was not dressed for riding, thank you, uncle," said Helen; "I preferred walking."

"Ye did? Well, I'm glad to see you here, and I'm sure mamma 'll be delighted!" And then, holding her at arm's-length and looking into her face he went on, half to himself: "Yes; I'd have known her *any* where for a Ledingham! She's the brows and twa een o' a

lassie I mind upon, more than five-and-twenty years ago—a bonnie lassie, and all the lads in the country-side were just daft about her—and” (with a little snivelling laugh) “the poor teacher as bad as any; but it was just ‘a fig for ye all!’ and went and married wi’ her cousin, Willie Ledingham from Deeside. Ah! ye follow me now, I see,”—he broke off, for Helen’s colour deepened slightly, and she looked as she felt a little annoyed.

“Well, ye’re tired and hungry and miry,” he went on, “and we’ll just go in and look for mamma!” He led the way into the picturesque but rather untidy little entrance-passage of the house, sending his voice before him: “Mamma! here’s your niece, Miss Helen Ledingham.”

The person thus called came hastily from some inner part of the low-roofed rambling old-fashioned house. She was a great contrast to her husband; a great contrast no less to her sister, Margaret Ledingham. Mrs. Argo was a small fair delicate-looking woman, with refined little features, and a still pretty face—but there were lines of care about it which made her, though really six years younger, look an older woman than Helen’s mother. Her life had been a very different one. Each sister had had her share of family cares and anxieties, of humble works and duties; but Margaret’s life had been cheered and her load lightened by a very different helpmeet from her sister’s husband.

If Elspet Ledingham had been faithless to her first love, her cousin Leslie Esslemont, no one but themselves

knew, for no acknowledged engagement had existed between them : nor had he ever by word or deed cast any blame upon her. But it is to be feared she had been faithless to a far Higher Love when she forgot the vows of her baptism and the grace of her confirmation, and gave up her birthright as a daughter of the Church, for Adam Argo, to become his disciple, his wife—and, it must be added, his slave.

If she had sinned, no doubt she had also suffered. A clever, fascinating, and often amusing person in his younger days, Adam Argo was possessed of a restless selfishness that could not but be galling to one closely connected with him ; of a capricious, variable temper also, at times morose to a degree. He had abilities without doubt, of no mean order ; but they were not well balanced. In his pulpit he was eloquent, earnest, and often forcible ; but in his parish, though kindhearted, he was unpopular from his flightiness, as well as his inveterate fondness for meddling with the temporal as well as the spiritual concerns of his flock. He was a great talker, or rather gossipper, and like most such had the character of being given to “drawing the long bow” ; while his ungoverned and rather unscrupulous ways of retailing anecdotes and scandal had not unfrequently been the cause of making mischief. In his politics he upheld whichever party might be favourable to Establishment ; while his hatred for “Dissenters” of all kinds, especially the Free Kirk, was as strong as if he had been the most orthodox Churchman.

In endeavouring to portray Adam Argo, I must not for a moment be understood to describe a type of the ordinary Presbyterian minister; of which he was a most abnormal specimen, differing as much from his professional brethren in general as the most erratic of newly-discovered comets from some sober orbit-keeping old planet.

In his domestic circle he was a strange mixture: fond of his children, and proud of them, yet often unjust and tyrannical—the latter perhaps chiefly towards his wife, whose submission to him was absolute.

Whatever her faults had been, Mrs. Argo was a patient, faithful wife, an anxious and affectionate mother. Her health was not robust, and often unequal to the strain of her family and other cares: thus she had anticipated with great satisfaction the coming of her niece as teacher and domestic helper.

She welcomed Helen with a motherly warmth that was grateful to the girl, making many and tender inquiries after the sister she now seldom saw, and the other members of the family. Helen was then introduced to the young cousins—Maggie and Sophia, with Elsie, her especial charge; the others being a nice little lad of ten who went to the parish school, a rosy-cheeked mite of six, and the baby. Helen found that she was to share a small room with Sophia, and have charge of that young person's toilet and wardrobe; an arrangement not particularly to her liking, for Sophia seemed to be a wild little reproduction of her father

in petticoats. Helen had certainly not fallen in love with her uncle on renewing acquaintance with him; and she liked him still less at the family tea—where he began by poking fun at her indirectly through his children, and making very outspoken allusions to her personal appearance and family likeness, half to his wife, half to himself. Then the servant-girl brought in the evening post, with a letter for him, which engrossed his attention completely. He informed his wife that it was from “Strathkessachie”—meaning, as Helen easily gathered, the laird, or principal heritor in the parish; and related to some dispute between Strathkessachie’s grieve and Mr. Argo, about which the latter had written. It appeared, however, that Strathkessachie’s view of the matter in dispute coincided with his grieve’s, which caused great indignation to the minister.

“Strathkessachie’s a fool!” he exclaimed at length, thrusting the obnoxious letter into his pocket.

A gentle “Mr. Argo!” from his wife was all the remonstrance she dared offer.

“It’s the truth,” said Mr. Argo coolly, “and I don’t care who hears me say it. He’s a downright fool—he or any man in his poseetion, who allows himself to be bamboozled—just led by the nose—by a creature like yon—a pairson of no eddication—and an aul’ doited eediot growin’” (Mr. Argo’s brogue grew broader and broader in his anger). “It’s jist favouritism, and no other thing.”

When there was at length a lull in the flow of his talk, Helen asked her aunt in a low voice if the family were now at Strathkessachie.

"No," answered Mrs. Argo. "They left a fortnight since at the term. They mostly go south in the winter—he has large properties in England—or on the continent."

"Is there a large family?" asked Helen.

"Three daughters and two sons. The young gentlemen are not much here, unless in the end of the season, for shooting; but the laird generally comes down in spring, with some of them—the daughters are nice-like girls."

"Oh," said the minister, who had fallen for the time apparently into a sort of absent trance, looking across at her with his sullen eyes,—“you think so, do you, Mrs. Argo?”

At which poor Mrs. Argo relapsed into a meek and subdued silence; and Helen did not feel inclined to hazard any more questions.

CHAPTER V.

MISS SPENCE.

"WHAT did you say was the name of the place your sister was going to, my dear—where your uncle Argo stops?" asked Mrs. Peter Ledingham of Jeanie, when she returned from meeting her sister at the station: "I did not quite catch it."

"Kessachie, Aunt Annie—Manse of Kessachie."

"Kessachie!" repeated the old lady. "That's singular—'tis a name I know right well."

"Do ye indeed, aunt?"

"Know it! I was born on the lands of Stra'kessachie—I ken every step of the place near—e'en tho' I hadna lived fourteen year wi' my old master, Leslie o' Stra'-kessachie, till I married frae his hoose."

"Ye did, Aunt Annie! Think of that, no'."

"Ay, ay. My first husband—Leslie's own father—was grieve there, as his father had been before him. We bided on there, four-five years, after I was married: my two dauchters were born there. I had the dyary" (dairy) "for a while; but I wasna able to keep on

wi' it, wi' my young children, forbye that Esslemont thocht he would like to set up wi' a farm o' his own. So we left; and the laird took on his brother, in's place, and we took a farm doon the country. I was real sorry to leave the auld place; and when my son was born, I was just for him to be named after the faimily."

"That was it," said Jeanie. "Then ye'd come to live in my mother's part o' the country."

"Ay; we'd a right farm, and we was real happy: little did ever I think to be left the way that I was so soon. My husband was a pretty stoot strong man as ever lived (Leslie's very like him, growin'), and never had a day's dis-health as long as I mind. It was no disease brought him to his grave. He got his death by the kick of a young horse that he'd bred himsel'—and was terrible prood o'—and died when his son was nae twa years auld."

Jeanie's little sympathetic shake of the head spoke more than words.

"Ye may easy see," continued the old lady, "that I would be able to feel for your own mother, knowin' what it was to be left a widdy wi' fatherless children. And mine were nae up to be a help to me. But the Lord was vera merciful to 's, and I made out pretty well, for some years; and syne after, I met in wi' your mother's uncle, Peter Ledingham, an' he asked me to be his wife—so I didna see what better I cud dee for us a' than say 'Ay' till him. And a good husband he was to me and father to my bairns, as Leslie can tell ye

himself' that never minded on any other father, poor fella."

"And where are your daughters now, Aunt Annie?"

"Well, they're both away fra' me: the oldest's mair-riest and out in Canada, and the second's housekeeper and maid wi' a faimily in England—and been this twelve year in the same place. I've not seen either o' them for lang—and maybe as I'm an auld woman growin' I'll not see them mair in this world, least my oldest. But she writes me often, and is doin' real well. Yes; I've much to be thankful for that they're both well-doin' and well respectit, as I brocht them up the best way 'at I was able; an' I've my good kind son to look to, to be the staff o' my auld age. He's aye been good to me, and never gied me a sore heart but once, when—I've tellt ye when *that* was,"—she broke off remembering the presence of Katie. "But I doubt not a' thing's been ordered for the best."

Jeanie mused for a little over her great-aunt's story—most of which she had never known till then. Presently she said: "Isn't it strange what way my sister has gone up there to stop? Didn't ye say your first husband's brother had been there? Maybe Nellie 'll meet in wi' some of his folk."

"Maybe. He's there yet, 's far 's I know. But they're auld-like folk, wi'out faimily, and winna maybe have much attraction for a young lassie. If they meet it'll likeliest be at the church; for your sister will likely attend your own church?—an' I know, as long

as the auld people can move out o' the bit, they'll go to the church."

"They'll be sure to meet," Jeanie said. "I know Nellie's to attend the chapel at Whinnymuir."

"Just that. They havena so far to go fra Stra'-kessachie as we had in our day—sin' the young laird—my bonnie Master Alickie that I took when he was just commencin' to go his lane—and his neist neighbour, biggit yon bit chapelie. My husband an' me had nine miles to go to attend our own place of worship."

"That was a long traivel."

"It was that—but we'd a good gig horse, and we didna often miss: no more did Esslemont's father, as long 's he was able to traivel. I've often heard my auld mistress say how that when they was drivin' to the church they would overtake him just at the cross-roads—and if their cairrage wasna full they would give him a lift; and the lady would say to him, 'Well, Mester Esslemont, you have a long ro'd to go to the church!' and that he would say, 'Ay have I, mem, but I've the mair time to conseeder whaur I'm goin' till.'"

"He'd been a true Christian," observed Jeanie; and then she suddenly exclaimed: "That's some person at the door, Aunt Annie; will I see who it is?"

"Ay, do, Jeanie—it's maybe Mrs. Fyffe or the minister—he hasna been this while. No; if it's nae just Miss Spence—the docter's daughter, ye ken!"

Jeanie went to the door and admitted a lively little lady of uncertain age, with a large head and long face

upon a dumpy, thick-set person, but dressed with a decided affectation of youthfulness. She tripped into the room with great alacrity, shaking hands warmly with Mrs. Ledingham. "Oh, how do you do, and how is my little pet to-day?" as she went up and kissed Katie effusively. "I fear you must indeed have thought I was never coming again; but I had a friend with me, and was a good deal taken up—and *now* my visit is partly professional, I say, for I have really come instead of papa! He was coming himself, when a message came for him to go a long way in *quite* another direction, so I said, 'Just you let *me* go to Katie; you may be sure if she were not so well, Mr. Esslemont would let you know at once, so careful as he always is'—so he was quite satisfied there was not any other real cause—and how are you, lovie?" Miss Spence wound up: "I really think you're looking better."

"I'm quite well, thank you, Miss Spence," Katie replied, her usual answer when asked how she was.

"And how is the sunflower getting on? Let's see—have you the right shades? Ah yes—Dada matched them for you—such a *kind* Dada! But your stitches are too long, my love, and you've dragged your cloth sadly—see!"

Katie pouted a little as Miss Spence turned over her poor little piece of work unceremoniously, but said nothing.

"Are you Katie's new nurse?" suddenly asked Miss Spence, looking at Jeanie; and as the latter made a

sort of smile of admission, or what she took for such, Miss Spence rattled on. "I heard Mr. Esslemont was getting her a new nurse—my father quite approved. Are you from town? No? Country—what part?"

"Deeside," answered Jeanie, who did not think it necessary to be very explicit.

"Ah, charming country—so salubrious. I always like to get a run up Deeside when I can get my father away for a holiday. But he is very fond of Nairn for invalids. I wanted to persuade Mr. Esslemont to send Katie to Nairn, and let *me* have charge of her; but papa put a veto,—indeed *both* papas—and mine is a sad tyrant; isn't he, Katie? Well now—about this unhappy sunflower—as I can sit with you for a bit—I thought perhaps nursie might be wanting out for a little air—such a bright day—I'm quite disengaged, nurse, and can stay half an hour with Katie," Miss Spence ended, looking at Jeanie, who had quietly sat down in her usual place with her sewing.

"I am not going out, thanks, miss," said Jeanie rather shortly.

"No? Oh, then,"—and after a little pulling and tugging at the unfortunate sunflower, "you look very young? Had much experience?—ever had a case like our little pet's?"

Jeanie was so much amused at being taken for a professional nurse by this talkative visitor that she scarcely knew what to reply, but Katie saved her the trouble this time.

"Jeanie's my cousin, Miss Spence—not my nurse. That's why she's stoppin' with me."

"Your cousin!—oh, I beg pardon, miss!"

"Yes; my own nice cousin, and her name's the same as Grannie's. Grannie Robbie said it was my *step*-cousin, she wis—but I'm not to call her any nasty step—like bad old step-mothers in stories. Eh, what horrid it must be to have a step-mother!" Katie finished casually.

"Eh! dear no, Katie, you're quite mistaken—isn't she, Grannie? You mustn't believe all the fairy-stories say. I've known step-mothers that were just as kind as kind could be, and took the greatest care of poor little girls who had lost their own dear mamma. Of course *you* have Grannie, so you can't tell what it would be to be left quite alone while your Dada was out or busy."

"No," replied Katie. "I've got Grannie—and Jeanie too."

Miss Spence began cutting and unpicking at the crewel-work rather spitefully. Her tongue, however, could not long remain silent.

"By-the-bye," turning to Mrs. Ledingham, "I met John Robbie after church last Sabbath. I said I supposed he was just out on a visit, but he said no—I fancied then perhaps Mr. Esslemont was finding him something to do nearer home—so kind I know he is to them all—but I didn't like to ask. Is he settling here, do you know?"

"'Deed, Miss Spence, you had better ask at himself—for I never meddle with my neighbour's consairns."

Miss Spence made a little pursed-up face of amusement. "Oh, well—I daresay his mother will tell me. It would be real nice for him to stay at home—such a nice lad as he's growing—and help her, but he looks delicate, like them all."

And then a little more desultory fidgetting conversation ensued; till Miss Spence had got all she could get from the old lady and Jeanie, and rose to take leave: not without first making some tender enquiries after the well-being of Mr. Esslemont. "Ah yes, I know—always busy, but I think he shuts himself up too much—not good for him, papa says—should go out more amongst his friends. Pray say to him papa and I would be so delighted if he would come in to tea any night—quite without ceremony; but if I knew the day I could get my sister Mrs. Bruce and her husband to come, and bring their music; I'm sure he'd enjoy it—and Katie having her *young friend*, he would not feel she was lonely, though I know he's such a good Dada, eh love?—and quite spoils you, doesn't he? Well good-bye, pet—good-bye, Miss—Esslemont, is it? no—Ledingham—I'll not forget—good-bye, Grandma!"

So Miss Spence hopped out, attended to the door by Grannie and Jeanie—the latter giving an unmistakable sigh of relief.

"Yon's a lady would like fine to be a step-mother," said Grannie, outside the room-door, with a little

chuckle; "but I dinna think she'll get her wish in *this* hoose, whatever!"

"Eh! what a tongue she has!" ejaculated Jeanie, solemnly.

"Awat has she." And then, putting her face to Jeanie's ear she whispered: "Leslie canna thole the sight o' her—but she's mindful o' Katie, I sanna say—and her father's a good man—and so we're sort o' needin' to be civil to her."

Going back into the room they found poor Katie shedding tears over her work. "She's been an' raivelt it all—I can make nothin' o' it now," she said pitifully.

"Let me see, darlin'ie," said Jeanie, taking up the work. "Eh my, but it's a mess! Never heed though, I'll maybe sort it."

But it cost Jeanie some time to put to rights Miss Spence's officious snipping and unpicking, and she felt quite inclined to echo poor Katie's sighing remark, "Eh! I wish Miss Spence would let us alone!"

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTMAS AT ABERMURCHIE, AND A LETTER
FROM THE MANSE.

JEANIE LEDINGHAM'S first Christmas away from home—that home now so irreparably saddened from henceforth—was altogether a peaceful, almost a happy one. It would have been quite happy but for the mournful memories which the first joyful anniversary after a great bereavement always brings, and for the thought of her mother and eldest sister. She could scarcely, even though sad, have been unhappy, really unhappy, in that household. There was nothing to jar on her feelings—quite the reverse. Little Katie's chronic affliction, her father's unforgotten widowhood, gave a chastened tone to the family circle: but the simple piety and resigned cheerfulness of all its members were comforting elements. Then Jeanie fully enjoyed and appreciated the services in "Mr. Fyffe's chapel," otherwise S. Mary's church. Mr. Fyffe, the grey-haired pastor, and his pleasant old wife, were old and tried friends of Katie and her father: a childless couple, they loved and sympathized with all

children, and very specially with this gentle little invalid lamb of the flock. They were not long in making friends with Jeanie, and interesting themselves in her history: sometimes they asked her to tea with them, and enquired kindly after the different members of her family. Jeanie was much interested in discovering that old Mr. Fyffe—a son of the soil—had been born in the same parish as her grandfather, and had known many of her relations in former days.

Apart from higher duties, the one object of father and grandmother seemed to be to make the season a festal one for little Katie—cut off as she was from most of the pleasures of childhood, and enjoyment of the Christmas services. Christmas cards poured in upon her from friends: her father brought her the nicest presents he could think of from town; and forewent even some of the services he so greatly prized, to sit beside her and read to her the “old story ever new,” the wondrous history that makes Christmas so especially the Children’s Festival; and to talk to her as he only did when they were quite alone together, of many high and holy and cheering topics; thus lightening and comforting the long hours of captivity so tedious to a child.

Jeanie had quite fallen into her place as one of the family. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Fyffe, she had of course become acquainted with the various other members of their social circle: such as Dr. and Miss Spence—the former Katie’s medical attendant—the parish minister

and his wife and daughters, and of course the Robbies. Mrs. Robbie was a thin quiet doleful woman, with a happy faculty for looking on the dark side of everything, and of finding matter of complaint even in what seemed to be fortunate events. In spite of her anxiety about her son Jock being employed in Leslie's office, she had been heard to say that the close confined life was very trying for him—that he had not got the appointment he wished for—and so on. She used to sigh and shake her head dismally over Katie too; but Katie was so thoroughly used to this as "Grannie Robbie's way" that fortunately it had no damping effect on her spirits. To the "lame lass" Agnes, Jeanie had taken rather a liking. She was a gentle sweet-tempered girl, very quiet of tongue and uncomplaining—leaving her mother to do the complaining for her. She was not to say "bonnie," but delicate and refined-looking; and Jeanie thought if Katie's mother had been anything like her she should not have been surprised at Leslie's choice after all. Agnes on her part took at once to the healthy country girl who was so ready to make friends with her in her semi-helplessness, and who would sometimes, when not wanted at home, leave her place by Katie's couch only to sit beside her lame aunt, whose sewing as well as her infirmity kept her closely confined.

Jock Robbie, in the meantime, accepted the work his "good-brother" had given him and was thankful. He was a not unfrequent visitor at Leslie's, coming in

with him after office hours, and bringing his flute to amuse Katie, usually spending the evening. He and Jeanie were on very friendly terms, though no one could have accused them of being more than ordinary friends. Jock had plenty of talk, and was friendly with everybody—and Jeanie was an honest, simple-minded girl, a child still in many ways, and accepted him as something of a relation already, dreaming of nothing more. She certainly felt, without actually admitting it to herself, that his company was pleasant: that the evenings when he dropped in were livelier than those ordinary ones when her cousin sat smoking and reading his daily local paper, or talking to his mother on topics which did not interest Jeanie at all, or sometimes—if he had been travelling or was tired—dropping asleep in his chair before the evening was over, “quite like my dear father after a hard day,” Jeanie used to think. In truth poor Leslie was not “amusing” to her—except when he might be “funning” with Katie. But Jock Robbie kept them all alive when he came; and if he were not going on with his boyish chatter, there was the “music”—and this was as great a delight almost to Jeanie as to her cousin.

Certainly Jeanie was very far from adopting the disdainful opinion entertained of the Robbies, root and branch, by her good Aunt Annie, who with all her charity and kindliness seemed never able to forgive them for poor Kate Robbie having left her son so early a widower with a cripple child.

Perhaps of all her new acquaintances Jeanie liked Miss Spence the least, as a fussy, forward, gossiping old maid : not that Miss Spence by any means considered herself old. She was wonderfully unlike her father. He was a fine old fellow, Dr. Spence : plain, rough, and blunt to a degree, but kind-hearted and tender-handed with all his patients. Katie was very fond of him ; though on many occasions in her suffering little life he had been obliged to put her to pain, yet she evinced no fear of him nor dislike of his visits. She was on the whole in better health this winter ; and he held out to her the hope of by-and-bye returning to the use of her long idle crutches.

Jeanie had the pleasure of a letter from her eldest sister not long after Christmas, which interested her very much as giving some insight into Helen's new life and associates. It ran as follows :

“Manse of Kessachie, 29th Dec.

“MY DEAR JEANIE,

“I am late, I own, in sending you a Christmas greeting ; but really one is so pressed here from morning to night that it is difficult to find a quiet moment for writing. This is quite what our Grandmother used to call a ‘tapsalteerie house’—a place for nothing, and nothing in its place. Poor Aunt Elspet is so far from stout, and has so much on her hands, that you cannot look on without helping her all you are able ; so the end of it is that my position here is a sort of servant of all works—the teaching the least part. If I had

had the slightest idea of it, or my mother either, I would never have been here: still, being here, I shall make the best of it in the meantime, hoping it may be a stepping-stone to something better. So not a word to our mother, should you be writing her; it would only annoy her.

“Yes, it is strange what you mention of Aunt Peter Ledingham’s friends being in this part. I have made the acquaintance of the old couple, and very nice-like old people they seem. Their gig overtook me once or twice on the road to church before I knew who they were. I have to thank them for my Christmas; for a few days before it we had a good storm, and I quite made up my mind I would have to stop at home. But on Christmas Eve a message came from the grievance—old Mr. Esslemont—to say was I going to chapel next day, their gig would take me up at the manse-gate. It was really very mindful of him: the more so as my uncle and he have had a quarrel—about some march-dyke, or something of the sort. My uncle cannot bear him, and was rather cross, I thought, about me going with them; but as it was an agreement I was to attend my own church, he could say nothing. It is a weary four miles in bad weather, as you can only take the short road over the moor in dry seasons. And when I have been there more than once, there has only been the clergyman’s wife and daughters, perhaps two girls from the village, myself, and the station-agent at Monthoolie. He is very polite in escorting me, as our roads are the same; and is the only person I have to speak to; and as he speaks about three words every ten minutes, it is very cheerful! He is a droll character. But he is a great person in the church—

secretary and collector and manager and what no; and he wrote me a formal note asking if I was to become a subscriber. I hear when the laird of Kessachie and the other gentry come down the chapel is very full; so I hope things will be a little more lively by-and-bye.

"There were some Sundays I could not get, so I just went to the parish church with my aunt. My uncle preaches remarkably well. What a flow of language he has! But when he comes out of the pulpit he just spoils all. I don't think any person knowing him in his own house would get great good from his sermons.

"As to the cousins, my pupils, I shall not say much. Elsie is very anxious and diligent, but slow; the others are quick, but dreadfully wild. I would far sooner manage a country school, where you have some command of the children.

"Now, dear Jeanie, I think I have given you a long grumble, so I will say good-bye. I am glad you were so well by last account, and the poor little lassie somewhat better. I send a card for you and one for her—the prettiest I could get here. With love to my aunt I remain,

"Your affectionate sister,
"HELEN LEDINGHAM."

CHAPTER VII.

S. SERVAN'S FAIR.

ONE warm summer day about six months later, Jeanie Ledingham stood before the glass in her little attic, attiring herself in her "Sunday braws" for a day's outing.

Poor Jeanie's "braws" were all heavy blacks still, of course. But otherwise she looked as if fate had dealt kindly with her during the past half year. Her cheeks were as fresh-coloured, her eyes as bright, as when she lived at the home-farm; she had not suffered either in looks or spirits from the confinement of a town life.

Of late her spirits had been much cheered by the decided improvement in her little charge. Dr. Spence had recommended out-door air for Katie; and as she was not quite fit yet for attempting to walk, her father bought the largest perambulator he could procure, for her use. In this, Katie, who was very small of her age, could sit quite comfortably and be easily propelled by her devoted Jeanie. Some of Jeanie's happiest hours now were spent in "hurling" * Katie along the quietest

* *Anglice*, wheeling.

streets and to the outskirts of the town, where there were open green fields and lanes, and sometimes they sought the banks of the Murchie burn, which below the town joined a larger river. Jeanie was delighted to see how Katie enjoyed the change of scene, and how she throve upon the fresh air. Indeed any person meeting them and seeing the bonnie little face, under a bewitching "Mother Hubbard" bonnet, lighted up with animation, and with quite a colour in the thin cheeks, would hardly have recognized the white pinched ailing little cripple of a year back.

And so also Jeanie got as much air and exercise as her sturdy country nature demanded, and plenty of interest in the taking of it. To-day, however, she was to have an outing on her own account—a real holiday: for this was S. Servan's fair-day, a great day in that locality and further; for the large market called S. Servan's fair was attended by persons from long distances, besides the neighbouring farmers. It was a large horse and cattle fair, with all the usual accompaniments of booths and stalls of all kinds; a great rendezvous of all the agricultural interest, both lairds and tenants, a place where friends sometimes "met in" who seldom met at other times.

And Jeanie had never been to this, or any fair on so large a scale. It was natural she should wish to see it: also it was quite possible she might meet a friend or neighbour from her own side of the country and have some home news by word of mouth.

Leslie always attended this market, and it had been proposed amongst them that he should take Jeanie for a jaunt, quite with the approbation of Aunt Annie, who had happy memories of S. Servan's in olden days, when she lived very near the scene of action.

Although Abermurchie was on the railway-line, the fair was held at some distance from the nearest station; so Leslie preferred taking the whole journey by road, and hired a dog-cart for his party, consisting of Jeanie and Jock Robbie. The latter had no especial call to attend the market, as Leslie had; but he had little difficulty in obtaining the holiday from his good-natured employer. Jock was rather fond of holidays; and, if for nothing else, he was needing to the fair to buy sweeties for Agnes and Katie—and, well, it would be an advantage for him to show Miss Jeanie the sights of the place while the merchant was doing his business and meeting his friends. Jeanie was not ill-pleased at the arrangement. She could not feel at a loss with two such esquires: her cousin would be sure to take good care of her, and she was quite sufficiently at her ease with Jock to feel safe in walking about with his protection. So it was in great spirits that, after kissing Katie and promising to bring her something pretty, she jumped up behind the dog-cart, and beside Jock—Leslie and the driver sitting in front: Mrs. Ledingham standing at the door to see them off, saying as they started, "Good-bye, and a pleasant trip. I hope the

day's to keep up though: we used to say there was aye a storm about S. Servan's."

"I hope there's no to be a storm the day," said Jock, looking rather anxiously at the sky.

There had been a spell of somewhat hot sultry weather, and the sky and landscape as they drove along were all covered with that thick dull half-lurid haze so common in that part of the country in the summer. The sun, however, was shining strong through it; and the dust, lying thick and white and powdery on the hard, straight turnpike-road, rose up in clouds behind their vehicle. Jeanie, however, was not in a humour to make troubles of trifles or to notice little disagreeables of that kind. She was child enough to be delighted at going to the fair; going too in such a pleasant manner, for a drive in the gig at home had been a great but rare treat—and with such agreeable companions. For Jock was very lively and entertaining; knowing the country he was able to tell her all the different places as they passed. And though Leslie did not join much in the conversation, Jeanie felt a sort of pride in belonging to this eminently well-to-do, well-known and respected man, for whom almost all whom they met or passed had a respectful salutation or a kindly word of greeting.

At a small wayside inn whereat they stopped to bait the horse, an old farmer, also on the road to the fair, came out for a "crack" with his friend.

"Hoo's a' wi' ye the day, Leslye?"

"Fine; how's yerself and the mistress?"

"Well, we're jist about wir ordinar'," replied the old man, proffering his snuff-box. "Hoo's little Kettie keepin'?"

"Thanks—I think she's always mending a little," said Leslie, dipping his fingers in the snuff. "Have ye got anything at the market, Mr. Smith?"

"Only jist but twa coeys,* an' a three-year-a'ld cowt. Ye'll maybe pass them upo' the ro'd. Na; I'm nae deein' gryte things at the sellin' the year."

And then he turned to the hind seat of the trap. "And pray who may this bonnie young leddy be that ye're convoyin'? I dinna hae the plizzure o' her acquaintance."

"Miss Jeanie Ledingham, fro' Deeside. Jeanie, this is my friend, Mr. Smith, Blackinches."

Mr. Smith, Blackinches, proffered an honest hard hand to Jeanie, but turned back to her cousin. "Miss Ledingham—yer niece did ye say?"

"No my niece. I hav'na nieces—in this part o' the world. My cousin—that's come to stop a bit with Katie."

"Ay, ay, jist that," said Mr. Smith, slowly and meditatively. "I hope ye'll enjye yersel' at the fair, Missie. 'Deed I hope we're nae to have a touch o' S. Servan's weather tho'—I doubt that's the thunder rumble-grumblin' hyne awa'.†"

"Seems like it; I think we'd best be joggin' on," said

* heifers.

† hyne awa,'—far away.

Leslie, as the horse took its nose reluctantly from the pail of meal and water. "Maybe the storm will keep off a whilie yet."

"Well, well. Gweed-bye, i' the meantime. We'll likely meet in i' the mairket." And as the dog-cart drove off Mr. Smith added jocosely: "Tak' care an' nae tyne yer bonnie lassie at the fair!"

Leslie nodded and laughed, but Jock Robbie looked rather sulky and muttered "Auld fool." But he brightened up again as they jogged on, though Jeanie thought he seemed rather nervously excited, and was watching the sky at times in some anxiety.

They reached the market-place duly.

Jeanie was delighted at the lively scene; the endless-seeming rows of dog-carts, gigs, and other vehicles put up in every available spot; the crowds of business or holiday folk, men, women and children; the strings of fine cattle and horses; sleek farm-favourites, innocent-looking awkward unbroken three-year-olds, solemn-faced sturdy mares and quaint ragged foals; and the large extent of white canvas booths, spreading up the face of the grassy hill. Jock Robbie was all eagerness to carry Jeanie off at once on a tour of inspection, and to this she and her cousin agreed, as it left him free to find the parties he wished to meet and to get over his business at once. "Take good care of her, Jock," were his parting instructions, "and see that ye keep out over from among the hoofs of the horses." "No fear of me," Jock answered lightly as he gave Jeanie his arm.

They went off at once, like a couple of children, to the toy and sweetie booths. Jock laid out largely in the latter commodity, but Jeanie's mind was more bent on finding some attractive plaything, not absolute rubbish, for Katie. Miss Katie was an old-fashioned little woman and did not affect dolls or regular toys; but Jeanie thought she would be charmed with a watch with movable hands and a magnificent long chain with purple glass seals. She bought a second one of these to send to her baby brother. There was a stall of cheap jewellery near; and here Jock, after turning over nearly every article, selected a pebble brooch, a shade less trumpery than most, which he insisted on Jeanie's accepting then and there; as well as a "lucky-bag" and more sweeties than she ought to have eaten in a year.

They spent a good while over these stalls, and when they emerged from the partial shelter the sky was much more overcast and the "rumble-grumbings" less distant.

"This confounded thunder puts me all wrong!" Jock exclaimed at length, impatiently. "My head's as sore as anything and just dirlin' with it. Doesn't it affect you?"

"No, I don't think so," said Jeanie. "I more often have a sore head" (headache) "*before* it comes."

"I say! we'd best get into one of the tents," he said presently. "One can enjoy nothing out here—and if the lightnin' comes near hand we'll have all the beasts flyin' loose."

"Do you think so? But surely the lightnin's more likely to strik' among the tents," said Jeanie.

"Tchut, nonsense. Come in here." He drew her towards one of the refreshment-tents. But it was very crowded—and there were a good many noisy, tipsy folk inside: altogether it looked so uninviting that Jeanie hung back.

"Won't ye come? Stay—I see a fella just gone in I've been wantin' to meet. I must speak to him. If it's too roch* for you just stop here—under the shelter of this cart—nothing can touch ye, and I'll not be minutes."

"Very well then. I'll just stand here. But please don't be long."

Jock hardly heard the last words as he dived under the canvas portal in search of his friend. Jeanie felt, to say the truth, a little forlorn. She was not used to being alone in crowds; but anything was better than that full, whiskey-reeking tent. So she took up her position under the shelter of the empty cart which Jock had indicated.

A good many rather long "minutes" passed, and he did not return. Perhaps the time seemed longer to her than it really was; but as the crowds of strange faces passed and gathered around, she began to feel a little uncomfortable—as if she should not care that any one whom she knew should find her in her present position; and that her cousin Leslie would at any rate be much annoyed at so finding her.

She stood hearing, without listening to, the Babel of tongues around her, till the sound of a familiar name

* roch—rough, unpleasant.

suddenly spoken behind her arrested her wandering anxious thoughts.

"Seen Leslie Esslemont the day?"

"Ay, I sa' him upo' the ro'd. I havena happened upo' him i' the fair."

The speakers were two farmers, who were lighting their pipes in a quiet corner behind the same cart by which Jeanie was standing, and he who had spoken last was evidently the "Mr. Smith" who had saluted Leslie at the wayside inn. Jeanie turned round involuntarily, but the two friends were separated from her by the intervening cart, and certainly did not observe her.

"Looks as gin a' thing was prosperin' wi' 'im, eh?" said the first speaker.

"Ay dis he," said the other, with a chuckle. "He's got a yong leddy wi' him the day. I speered gin she were his niece, but he said nae jist that—some sort o' a cousin—a right genteel-lookin', nice-like lassie."

"Number twa, mebbe?"*

Another chuckle. "Oh, well, I didna jist speer sae far's that: but I thocht i' my ain mind, Leslie Esslemont might dee a heap waur nor tak'—Keep's a'!—yon wis a richt flash!"

If Jeanie had at all taken in the sense of the last sentences, it was completely driven out of her mind by the interruption. For a great sheet of forked flame seemed to fall in the very midst of the canvas erections around, followed instantaneously by a loud cracking

* Mebbe—may be.

report immediately above the head. The old horse tethered at the back of his cart made a sudden plunge round, which caused Jeanie to move forward a little. In less than two minutes another flash, and even more alarming thunderclap, succeeded, and this was followed by a stampede of people down the hill, the cause of which was not far to seek; for with a thud of heavy hoofs a terrified young carthorse came galloping through the crowd, dragging its rope, vainly pursued by a half stupefied country lad. There was a rush forward of some of the men to catch it, and in the confusion which followed the crowd quite surrounded Jeanie, and she found herself drifting further and further from the spot where her companion had left her and where he would of course expect to find her. And what was to become of her now? How were either of her friends to find her?—were the thoughts of the terrified girl, every moment more sensible of her helplessness, her utter loneliness in the crowd. And such a crowd! Farmers, excited and angry, in a state of anxiety about their beasts; half tipsy farm-servants male and female, and wholly tipsy cattlemen and drovers; anxious wives and matrons and frightened girls: screaming, shouting, jostling, tramping, swearing, each after their kind, added to which were the bellowings of the frightened cattle and plunging of the horses, as the lightning played amongst the stalls and booths.

And now the rain commenced in great heavy drops, descending presently in torrents against which Jeanie's

little black silk holiday sunshade was poor defence indeed. The rain caused a greater press towards the shelter of the tents, and Jeanie was obliged to follow the course of the stream, being powerless to fight against it. At length, when feeling almost in despair, she heard to her untold relief an unmistakable home-voice close behind her exclaim: "Eh my, if it's not Jeanie!" and turning round, she saw her brother Sandy, the young farmer, together with Leslie Esslemont, endeavouring to approach her through the throng. With a sort of desperate struggle Jeanie thrust herself back and caught her brother's arm.

"Jeanie—why, who—what on this airth are ye doin' here by yerself?" "What's come of Jock?" were the wondering exclamations with which she was assailed.

"He went into a tent near the top of the hill a while back," said Jeanie; "he said he wouldn't be long."

"The rascal! I think I'll not soon lippen to *him* again," said Leslie, looking more angry and annoyed than Jeanie had ever seen him.

"It wasn't right to leave her in such a plight as this certainly," said Sandy Ledingham. "I'd like to give the fellow a line o' my mind on the subject. But come away, come, till I take ye to some place of shelter, for ye'll be dreepin' wet, poor lassie."

"Ay. Ye'se best take her to Braefit—that large farm just off the road, where the most of the gigs are. Ye'll likely get some place for her to sit and dry her things,"

said Leslie, "and I'll go and look up this scamp, and ask him the meanin' o' this."

Jeanie glanced up for a moment eagerly.

"Don't be angry at him, Leslie. It was partly my blame, indeed, for I would not go inside the tent as he wished me; there was some one he was needin' to see; and then he might have sought me and missed me with me movin' away."

"He'd no right to leave ye under *any* pretext, Jeanie," said Leslie gravely. "I am annoyed that ever I entrusted ye out of my own sight. But now since ye've got your brother, haste ye on and get into shelter."

He turned hastily away and Jeanie walked on with her brother towards Braefit. She had so much to ask him of home news, that what had just happened was driven out of her mind for the time, as she listened eagerly for accounts of her mother and Lizzie, and the little ones. "And ye've heard about Peter?" Sandy said.

"No. What about him?"

"Oh well. He's been goin' in terrible for athletic sports this last few months, and they say he promises to be one of the best vaulters in the country. He's going to enter for the Stralogie games, in September."

"Eh, what fun!" cried Jeanie, her eyes sparkling with delight. "I would like to see him."

"My mother doesn't just *greatly* care about it for him," said the wise Sandy. "There's a great mixter about these gatherings always, and some of them ye're

thrown wi' is not just the best company for a young chap. But I hope Patie 'll no be too much ta'en up with it. And by the way—have ye haired fro' Nellie lately? My mother hasn't got a line this while—and she's some anxious to know if she'll be well enough."

"I heard from her about a fortnight syne," Jeanie answered, "and she didn't say but she was pretty well, an' that."

"Is she happy up there? She never says a word of that in her letters."

Jeanie hesitated a little. For Helen in her "grumbles" to her sister always strictly enjoined silence on the subject in writing home. And Jeanie knew that honest old Sandy could never keep any thing of the sort from his mother.

"Well, I think," Jeanie said at length, "she's not just carin' very much about the place, an' that; she was a little disappointed I think about the teaching, but she always said she was never to mind, in the mean time. Of course it's a dull-like place in the winter; but the family's come to Strathkessachie now, and Helen says she saw some of them at the chapel."

All this, and more conversation than can here be recorded, took place in a corner of a very crowded farmhouse room indeed—where, however, the mistress of Braefit contrived to let Jeanie squeeze herself into a place close to the fire to dry her "*tails*" a little.

And at length Leslie Esslemont came in. He peered

round the room till he caught sight of Jeanie, then beckoned her to him.

"I'll get ye away at last, I believe," he said in a low voice. "The Springs are going to the train in one of that waggonettes that's running between this and the station, and they'll take you with them. You'll be all right with old Mrs. Spring, ye know. I couldn't let ye go home by road such a night as this."

"But are you not coming, Leslie—and John?"

"Never you mind about John. He doesna deserve that you should think about him."

"But he was real unwell with the thunder," Jeanie pleaded, "and I don't think he should stay."

"He'll not stay. He's not well—but I don't know that the thunder's altogether to blame. But come you away, my dear," and as he led her out he added: "I hope this is the first and last time anything of the sort 'll happen while ye're with *me*."

So Jeanie performed her return journey under the escort of old Mrs. Spring—(a farmer's wife with whom she had little previous acquaintance, but who was a friend of Leslie's)—first in a crowded waggonette, and then in an equally crowded railway-carriage. She did not feel very bright; nor had she much to say to those at home about her day. She told Grannie that the storm had spoilt their enjoyment a good deal, and that Leslie had sent her home by train because she was so wet, and he was not ready: she believed he would be back in a little.

It was rather late, however, when he did come; and though he tried to amuse Katie with his account of the storm, and the alarm of the "beasts," he was not so cheerful as usual. Jeanie at length ventured to ask how John Robbie was now.

"Mr. John Robbie's safe at home—thanks to his friends," replied Leslie. "And I've forbidden him to set his foot in this house, for Katie or any other pretext, for the next month."

CHAPTER VIII.

AGNES PLEADS.

POOR Jeanie did not go to bed in a very happy frame of mind after her day of "pleasure." She might well be tired and upset, after the excitement, fright, and the two journeys on such a sultry close day. That was not all, however. She had been taken in charge by John Robbie, and been forsaken by him; and John Robbie had misbehaved himself further, in some dreadful way, only to be dimly guessed at from Leslie's hints. Jeanie, whose brothers were very models of steadiness, hardly could allow herself to guess at it. But Leslie was very much displeased with him, there was no doubt, to have punished him so severely as to forbid him the house. Perhaps Jeanie felt instinctively that he was not the only person punished. She knew that both she and Katie would miss those constant cheery visits; and was even inclined—not knowing the ins and outs of the case so well as Leslie did—to think her cousin was a little hard.

And then, as the events of the day came crowding

back to her mind with their various confused images, a sudden recollection struck her of the words of old Mr. Smith and his crony, which she had so unwillingly, and half-unconsciously, overheard. Thinking them over, she could not help being aware that they related to herself as well as to her cousin. She had heard people make joking remarks of that sort before, of course, though not about herself. She was too childlike and simple-minded even now, to feel much more at first than a sense of the utter absurdity of the idea. Herself and Leslie! *Old* Leslie, who was getting bald on the top of his head, and went to sleep in the evening over his papers, and of whom his friends would sometimes, jesting, say to his face as well as behind his back that he "looked as gin a' thing was prosperin' wi' him"—because he was getting so stout! Poor Leslie! Certainly Jeanie Ledingham, at eighteen, did not feel any consciousness, or maidenly shame, at being the subject of such a remark as she had overheard; only perhaps a little angry and annoyed after a bit, that such a thing *could* be said, could be even imagined, by any one. Leslie, she was quite sure, would laugh at the idea if presented to him, if indeed he were not angry also. She would not like to think of such an idea being presented to him at all; but at any rate she was thankful one person had not been there to hear the remark. That was at least a fortunate consequence of John Robbie's desertion of her.

So finally Jeanie fell asleep, to act over the day again

in her dreams with many a puzzling variation : at last waking with a great start, after imagining that Leslie had been trying to persuade her to come and be married to him in a tent at S. Servan's because he did not like her to be left alone !—and John Robbie had left her to try and catch the horse which had run away.

Two or three days after that unlucky S. Servan's, Jeanie, sitting at her work, perceived the rather unusual sight of Agnes Robbie, on her crutches, coming up to the door. Jeanie hastened to admit her. Agnes was doing some work for her just now, and had a small parcel in her hand, which might or might not be an excuse for her visit : for she very rarely waited on those who employed her at their own homes.

"Jeanie!" she said rather breathlessly. "I've brought one of your bodies to fit—and will I speak with ye a few minutes yerself?"

"Come in," said Jeanie, and as there was no other place where they could be alone, she led her up to her own attic—rather a toilsome ascent for poor Agnes. Once at the top, she sat down on a chair to gather breath to speak, unfolding her parcel with very tremulous hands. At length she looked up appealingly at her friend, and said in a hurried half-whisper : "I hope—I hope ye'll not cast off poor Jock—for his mistake."

"Me—cast him off?" repeated Jeanie, wondering.

"Yes; he's so very unhappy, poor fella—my mother and me doesna know what to do with him. And ye see, Leslie's forbidden him this house in the meantime;

so as he's not able even to come and speer how you was keepin', and if you was the worse of the storm. And he's troubled that ye're angry at him, and won't speak to him again. So I said, to try and comfort him, I would just mak' the exairtion to step over and see you myself. I hope ye'll not consider I've taken a liberty, Jeanie, but if ye would just give me a kind word to take to him, to show you're not angry, it would comfort him some."

"I'm sure I was never angry, for my part," said Jeanie. "Of course," she added simply, "I'm sorry for him."

"Ay; I thought ye would be, you're so kind, Jeanie, and always been, to us. And I hope you don't mind of me askin' you still to be his friend? I'm sure it's been such a help to him. So ye'll let me take him just some kind message, won't ye, Jeanie dear?"

"I don't know that I'm needin' to send him messages," said Jeanie, rather bluntly, "unless—ye may tell him I'm quite well, and that I'm not angry at him for leavin' me."

"Thank you," said Agnes, with a little sigh of relief. "I know he thinks a great deal of you, Jeanie, and there's no one whose kind word he values more." Jeanie said nothing; but Agnes, who was older and more experienced, saw that her colour deepened considerably.

"Mother and I have known such a difference upon him this while," she went on. "He's kept this

appointment, ye see, a half year—and seems so happy and settled-like, by what he's ever been—and it seems so disapp'intin' like to see him all disheartened about this. Of course I know Leslie's cross with him now, and maybe he thinks it's for his good. But 'deed one wouldn't need to be hard upon him. Jock isna a lad, ye know, that takes more than he ought, for common. But the thunder always puts him wrong—it has such an effect on his nerves. It's just the same with us all—I'm sure it makes me that I don't know what I'm doin'—and he told me after, he had felt so ill he didn't know what to do. I blame rather those that he met in with, myself."

Jeanie said nothing to this.

"Well, I'm glad I came over to see you," Agnes said presently, when the trying-on business had been settled. "And now, there's one more thing. If you would come up to tea with us some night, me and mother would take it so kind. I don't say this week, maybe—but say a matter of some four-five days—or next Saturday. Would ye come? Ye've not been to see me this while, ye know."

"Well," said Jeanie meditatively, "I might try."

"That's right," said Agnes again. "And now I'll be going, I think."

"Are ye for away? Won't ye come and see Katie?"

"No; I think not now. It was you I came to see, and I've said what I was needing to say—I've my work waitin' me at home."

"Was yon Agnes Robbie?" said Mrs. Ledingham, when Jeanie went back to the living-room. "She doesna often come. What was she wantin'?"

"She'd brought some of my work—and she'd a little business with me," Jeanie answered, feeling, she hardly knew why, a little impatience of the old lady's questioning.

"Humph! Seems she might have looked in and speered for Katie, when she *wis* here," said Grannie. "She hasn't seen her this while. Her business wi' you had been terrible parteec'lar, I'm thinkin'?"

Jeanie did not reply to this, but took up her work and sat down in her usual place beside Katie. She did not feel disposed to take Aunt Annie into her confidence regarding Agnes Robbie's business with her. Simple and open as Jeanie was she had begun to find out that on some subjects she could keep her own counsel, and preferred doing so.

CHAPTER IX.

VISITORS AT MANSE OF KESSACHIE.

IN the mean time, how was it faring with Helen ?

The summer found her still at Manse of Kessachie, and outwardly, at all events, quite reconciled to her somewhat monotonous life. It had been a dull winter: almost as dull a spring, for she had formed few acquaintances, and of these few, none who particularly interested her. She was on very friendly terms with the old griever of Strathkessachie and his wife, whom she met at least every Sunday; and with "her own minister," a plain and rather prosy type of his class, who took his duties somewhat easily. She did not fraternize much with the village folk. In fact the very miscellaneous duties of her rather scrambling life at the manse left her little time for going out.

Her first friend in these parts—the station-agent at Monthoolie—continued her very devoted admirer and esquire—whenever he had the opportunity. In fact he had been immensely smitten by the "right genteel lass" who had landed at his little territory on that

"dubby" November day; and improved every occasion of meeting her by a sort of solemn, prosaic, but most earnest courtship. Indeed his attentions were becoming rather burdensome to Miss Ledingham, who had at first accepted them tacitly, because she had no one else to speak to, but who had no intention of allowing matters to become serious.

One day in the end of July, Helen was seated at the jangling cabinet piano in the manse drawing-room beside Elsie Argo, who was endeavouring most laboriously to "take out" a page of a rather brilliant *morceau de salon* which her honest ambition prompted her to desire to learn, when the minister burst in upon them.

"Hist ye, young ladies, shut up your piano, and put on your braws, for that's the laird an' the lady o' Kessachie and all their party comin' down upon us o'er the brae."

Elsie jumped up, overturning her music-stool in her hurry, and flew out of the room; followed, less precipitately, by Helen. That young person was never precipitate. There was a general scurrying of young Argos to the upper regions, and Sophy seized on her teacher-cousin with the demand, "Come away, Nellie, and help me to get into my best frock for the laird!"

Meanwhile the laird and his lady with two daughters and a young lady and gentleman (visitors) had been duly admitted by a maid-servant, and were now sitting in the evacuated dusty blind-shaded little drawing-room, admiring, as well as the dim light permitted, the shell ornaments and brightly-bound books, and the

large oil-painting of Mr. Argo in pulpit gown and bands, in the bloom of his youth and his early ministry.

He scarcely resembled that smoothly-limned portrait when he went in to his guests, having turned down his cuffs and sleeked down his hair by way of preparation. A few minutes after his wife followed him. Mrs. Argo never could look anything but lady-like, though she had also undergone a somewhat hasty "getting into" her best dress, placing an elegant little cap upon her still golden hair. She received her rather numerous visitors with her usual unaffected simple cordiality, and indeed it was always a real pleasure to her to meet Mr. and Mrs. Leslie of Kessachie. The laird—Mrs. Peter Ledingham's "bonnie Master Alickie"—was a genial country gentleman between fifty and sixty; his wife a kind motherly lady, who had a sincere compassion and admiration for the minister's delicate, gentle, rather too evidently down-trodden, little wife. After the usual civilities had passed, Mrs. Leslie inquired after the children; and Mr. Argo sent his voice pompously down the passage: "Desire Miss Ledingham to bring in the young ladies."

Upon which they made their appearance in due form—Elsie, Maggie and Sophy—having scrambled in—to fashionably-made much-kilted tight dresses of the material known as "summer serge"—with evident want of preparation in the matter of collars and cuffs; Elsie and Maggie having tied stiff white muslin neckties round their necks, and superadded gorgeous necklaces

of light-blue beads—the dresses were green. Rather in contrast to her awkward squad, Helen's tall figure, in the neat well-kept black that needed no change, followed them into the room with her stately step. There was much handshaking, and even some kissing of the manse young ladies; and then Mr. Argo drew Helen forward. "Mrs. Leslie, this is Mrs. Argo's niece—Miss Ledingham. She was not with us last year."

Mrs. Leslie looked up kindly at the tall pretty girl in her deep mourning, and took her hand. "I think I saw you at church on Sunday. You played the harmonium, did you not?"

"Yes, Mrs. Leslie. I have taken it once since Mrs. Davidson was laid up."

And then as the young ladies shook hands with her, Mr. Argo continued in a low voice to Mrs. Leslie: "She's acting as our governess just now, but she's *far* too good for us. She had a most excellent eddication—passed very high at all the exams.—could take *any* place as a certeefficated teacher; but she had not been able to get just the opening she was looking for, and then her father died last winter, and so she's glad to stop with us at present—there's a large family of them. She has brought on Elsie wonderfully with the piano—I would like ye should hear her, Mrs. Leslie. Elsie!"—raising his voice suddenly above the general conversation—"sit down at the piano and let Mrs. Leslie and the Miss Leslies hear how much ye've advanced under yer new instructress!"

Poor Elsie, red to her honest finger-tips and quivering with awkwardness, sat down obediently at the instrument, and performed her last new *morceau* in a decidedly jerky style, which however Mrs. Leslie could honestly say was an improvement upon last year. "Does Miss Ledingham play? I should like to hear her," and so Mr. Argo called out again: "Helen, my dear, ye'll oblige us all very much by giving us one of yer fine pieces—French, German, Italian—we shall not be too particular which."

"Oh, don't you play Scotch music?" said Maude, the second Miss Leslie. "I *love* to hear it so, and can't play it a bit. *Do* play a reel or a strathspey to us; I know you do."

Helen seated herself and struck up 'Monymusk' with the *verve* of a born Scotchwoman. Mr. Argo began to whistle *sotto voce* and snap his thumbs and fingers. "Ye'll set the lassies dancing," he said; and Miss Leslie caught at the idea. "Oh yes, do. Last year they showed us a threesome reel so prettily. My cousin, Miss Penreath, has never seen one. Do, Elsie, try."

Elsie and her sisters shrank back into a corner, **but** their inexorable father pushed them out **amid** imploring, giggling protests of "papa!" But when they **were** once launched the awkwardness seemed to **vanish**, and the three little figures went in and out, and **the** feet twinkled, as if they had been three Highlanders competing.

"Capital! famous!" cried both ladies and gentlemen. "How beautifully you play reel music!" said Miss Leslie. "I'd give *anything* to do it like that."

"I don't approve of reel music for the style," said Helen. "It's strange, but music-teachers seldom do."

"I would give a good deal for *that* style, wouldn't you, Maudie? Well, but now, play us something else, if you're not tired."

"Ay, Helenie, come on, ye're not letting them hear your fine music," said her uncle. "We're not seekin' the wild Scotch reels the now. Where's yon piece of Show Pin, ye call it—hist ye," in a rather different tone of whisper, "ye don't know what it may lead to, lassie!"

"Chopin's 'Fantasia,'" said Helen, with that little scarcely-perceptible frown which came oftenest when she was in contact with her uncle.

"Ay, come on," so Helen obeyed. Mr. Argo sat down and posed now as the affectionate father, with his three girls round him, stroking their heads and patting their shoulders.

At the end of this performance, the young gentleman visitor, who had not taken much part in the conversation hitherto, said quietly: "Thank you. That is Chopin, I'm sure."

"Your favourite Chopin, Horace," said the lady spoken of as Miss Penreath, who was his sister.

"Yes; I knew I couldn't be mistaken. An awfully pretty thing."

Then, after some complimenting from the ladies, the visit came to an end, as far as Helen and her pupils were concerned; though Mr. Argo would not let the party go till he had dragged off the long-suffering laird to look at a part of his garden-wall which he wished rebuilt and extended. The ladies looked round the picturesque little wilderness of a garden, and presently the minister came flying up to them, his hands full of large ripe strawberries, he having some choice plants of which he was very proud.

At last the visitors got away; and Helen, standing with Elsie at an upper window, had, unseen, an opportunity of watching the departing group as they went down the brae: the laird and Mrs. Leslie first, then Miss Leslie and her cousin Mr. Penreath, Miss Maude and his sister. Of the two Leslie girls, Helen preferred the appearance of Maude. Miss Leslie was a little too "pronounced" in every way—dress, tone, and style. Miss Penreath was a very fashionably-dressed, though quiet-mannered girl, and her brother a strong active young man, not handsome but pleasant of expression, and plainly attired in a grey shooting-suit. Helen did not agree with Maggie's decided opinion that Miss Leslie was by *far* the bonniest, and had such an elegant red sash—she only wished papa would give "me and Elsie" ones like it. "I never saw the two strangers before—they never came to Kessachie," she added.

"What a very odd person Mr. Argo is!" said Miss Penreath to Miss Leslie, as they walked home. "I

really was afraid I should laugh, he said and did such funny things. Are *all* Scotch ministers like him, Kitty?"

"Oh dear no! Very few, I hope. I never saw one the least like," said Miss Leslie.

"I should think he was a unique specimen," said her mother.

"His wife is very different," said Maude.

"Very. She looks half afraid of him."

"Awfully pretty girl that Miss Thingummy—what d'ye call her?—the governess or whatever she is!" said Horace Penreath.

"Yes," said Maude. "And how well she plays."

"Fancy her slaving at teaching those little barbarians!" said Kitty.

"She does look too good for them, as Mr. Argo said," said Mrs. Leslie. "I fancy she is only there till she hears of something better—a school or a private situation."

"I wonder if she would do for Fanny," said Miss Penreath. "She wants a nursery governess."

"Rather a superior article in that line," said her brother; "playing Chopin, and all that."

"Yes; and your Scotch 'female teachers' are so extensively educated," said Kitty. "I bet you Miss Ledingham knows as much Latin as you do, Horace, and grammar and analysis enough to give one brain fever!"

"Fancy Fanny's poor infants learning analysis!" said Horace.

"Where have I heard the name Ledingham?" said Mrs. Leslie. "It is surely familiar."

"There are endless Ledinghams in the country," said the laird. "But I'll tell you—my old nurse, Annie Muirison—who married Esslemont the old griever—married a Ledingham for her second husband."

"Ah! to be sure. I had forgotten. Poor old Annie! I wonder if she is in the land of the living—and her boy, too, who was called after your family. How proud she was of that boy, the time she came to see us!"

"Yes. I've not heard of her for long. The boy got into business, in Abermurchie, I believe—but he must be a good deal more than a boy now!"

And so they went on to other reminiscences.

CHAPTER X.

JOCK PLEADS FOR HIMSELF.

JEANIE LEDINGHAM did not say anything about Agnes Robbie's invitation, to her great-aunt. But she had by no means forgotten it. She was quite determined also to accept it, if not actually prevented. Yet as the day drew nearer she seemed always to feel a greater degree of reluctance to opening the subject.

When the Saturday came, Jeanie went through all her ordinary work as usual; and it was rather arduous, for Aunt Annie liked a good deal of cleaning and tidying up of a Saturday. Then she took Katie for her accustomed "hurl"—no sinecure either, for the day was a warm one. But when this was over too and the afternoon wearing on, she at length addressed her aunt: "Can you and Katie want me a short time this evening, Aunt Annie? Mrs. Robbie has asked me to tea with her."

"Hey?" said Aunt Annie with her curious little characteristic snort and movement of the head, like an impatient pony. "When did she ask ye?"

"Agnes asked me a while ago. I said I would, gin you weren't needin' me."

"Well, it's no me'at'll hinner ye. I know fine, young lasses needs a change, at a time, and ye have sat at home very steady. There can be nothin' why ye shouldn't go and visit Leslie's gude-mother; and ye winna get any harm fra' Agnes. But just mind an' dinna pay ower muckle heed to yon saft-tongued withercock o' a Jock, gin he be in about—that's *my* advice t' ye."

Jeanie's tell-tale colour surged up over her face and neck, which Aunt Annie could not but observe. "Ah, ye're affronted, lassie, I see, and maybe ye think I havena the right to speak to ye—but it's for good I'm meanin't. There's none o' that Robbies—men, I should say—that's turned out for any good. And by all I see Jock's like to go after his brothers—though I know he's pleasant spoken." She turned away then, and Jeanie said nothing but went up-stairs and began to dress.

She found, on arriving at Mrs. Robbie's, Agnes and her mother alone. They both received her affectionately and with much apparent pleasure. Mrs. Robbie inquired much for little Katie, over whom she shook her head mournfully even when Jeanie assured her that she was a good bit stronger and enjoyed her airings. "Dr. Spence thinks she'll maybe win to her crutches soon."

"Ye might bring her here, Jeanie, whiles, I'm think-

fan she's out her ride," Mrs. Robbie said. "It dld be some change till her."

I could easily do that," said Jeanie. "But the tor's for her to be in the fresh air all that she can, she wearies if she's kept too long—and my aunt bids me take her the way o' the country-roads and from among the streets."

They chatted for a time quietly together, and then, as they were going to sit down to tea, Jock came in. Jeanie had not seen him since the episode of S. Ser-'s. He was looking well, and had evidently got himself up with some care; but he approached Jeanie with a hesitating and deferential demeanour unusual, not unbecoming, to him; as if he doubted how she ght receive him. And Jeanie was rather constrained—partly from the fear of being supposed to be offend—partly also from the words Agnes had spoken before: could not meet him in the old familiar, unconscious of the past, try how she might; but her gentle face l manner had nothing of offended pride or resentment, and Jock appeared to gather courage as the meal at on. All through it, however, he was far less gay l talkative than usual; though he waited on Jeanie h the utmost politeness, and seemed to watch her h a humble anxiety to please, by which her honest art could not but be touched. When tea was over, did not volunteer to give them music, as his old bit was; but on Agnes asking if he were not to give am a tune, he looked first at Jeanie, and when she

smiled and expressed her wish that he should, he took up his flute at once and played whatever was asked for. Then Agnes and he sang one or two songs together, with great correctness and simple pathos: Jeanie was induced to try one which she used to sing at home; and altogether the time passed very pleasantly to all.

At half-past seven, Jeanie rose, saying she required to go—it would be getting on for Katie's bed-time; at which John Robbie got up and, fetching his hat, said: "If you've no objections, Miss Ledingham, I shall do myself the pleasure of putting ye so far on your way home."

Jeanie made no objections, so, after a friendly leave-taking of the womenfolk, the two set off together.

"What a lovely night!" said Jeanie, as they left the door. For the sun was setting in a glory of golden radiance below the rugged crests of a ridge of hills beyond and behind Abermurchie; and flooding the whole valley with light, in which the usually rather prosaic though peaceful and smiling agricultural district lay bathed and transfigured. Even the stiff cold-looking granite-built houses of the long straggling principal street were touched and glorified by that golden glow.

"Yes. It's a fine night for a bit stroll. Will ye come with me just as far round as by the banks of Murchie? It'll not hinder any time, and I've a word or two I'm needing to say to ye. Yes, come," as Jeanie hesitated for a moment, and she saw that he was quite

in a quiver of nervous eagerness. "I'll not think ye've forgiven me unless ye do."

"No? Well then," she replied, "just a short way, maybe"—and so she suffered him to lead her on, with her arm through his, just as they had walked at S. Servan's.

"First of all, *am* I quite forgiven?" he said, when they had got a little away from the thick of the houses. "I think so—or ye wouldn't have met me the night. I've never been able to tell you, so unhappy as I've been ever since—'deed I was just in misery to think how I'd left ye your lone, and in such a storm and that. But if it hadna been the thunder, I would never have done it. I never could stand thunder, from a child—it's no that I'm frightened, but it just puts my nerves all wrong—and it's the same with us all. But you do forgive me?"

"I never thought of any other," said Jeanie.

"I'm glad to hear ye say so. 'Deed I was that vexed about it I didn't know rightly what to do, till poor Aggie hirpled over to see ye herself. But that's not all, Jeanie, that's been putting me near distracted this whilie."

Jeanie felt that this was growing serious. But she could not help it: nay, she felt, as she walked on and listened, as if she were under some curious spell or dream, only acting out something that she had known—always known—was to be.

"Do *you* know, I've great reason to be grateful to

Leslie Esslemont that he's forbid me his house? Because it has learnt me something that else, maybe, I might have gone on, and gone on, and never found out for a long time! I've been ever so much happier and better, every way, these last months, than I ever was in my life—more content with my work than I expected, when I commenced to it—and so on. And since he's stopped my coming in about to poor little Katie, and spending an evening now and again over there—a' thing's been changed to me. So I was just to try and set to work to find out what ailed me, do you see—and it's just yourself that I'm needing, Jeanie—just you that I'm feeling the miss o'—and no other thing."

Jeanie's heart beat fast; she could not find a word to say, at the first: she walked on with her blushing face bent towards the ground. But that which she had known was coming, in that mysterious, unconscious way—it had come now. They two, boy and girl as they were, had found out that they loved each other—were necessary to each other's happiness.

"Jeanie! I love ye the best thing upon this earth! What will ye say to me, now? Won't ye give me *one* kind word?"

"Oh, John!" she said with a little breathless gasp, "Oh, John! what would I say?"

"Say that ye like me—just a little bittie—come, I know ye do, or ye wouldn't have been always so kind to me—say it to me, Jeanie."

"Yes, John, I do like you."

He put his arm round her waist and kissed her with an eager vehemence that made her shrink back shyly. This love-making was quite new to her; and though poor Aunt Annie's advice and caution might be cast to the winds, she could not but think of her mother and her home-folk—and what they might say.

"What are ye feared at?" he said. "Do ye think the trooties in the burn are lookin' at us?"

"No but—please don't, John"—as he gave her another squeeze—"and ye know, I've said nothing after all."

"Ye've said a' thing when ye've said that ye like me. Ye can't unsay that, eh, Jeanie?"

"Likin's one thing, though," said Jeanie, with a little undertone of sober coquetry.

"Ay, I know—but whiles it leads on to some other hing? I liked *you*, Jeanie, the first time ever I saw *he* bonnie lassie sittin' up so prim and proper aside *Latie's* sofa—and just teetin'* up now and again to *ee* whatten a strange laddie it was with the flutie! *but* it's come to be more than likin' with me. It's *ome* to this, no'—ye've my future in your hands, Jean *edingham*—to make of me what you will. If ye'll be *ind* and true to me, give me your word, now, I'll *maybe* turn out good for something, after all—for I'll *lo* and be anything ye like; but if ye throw me off, I'll go to the bad, as sure's death!"

"Oh whisht, John!—ye've no right to speak that way."

* peeping, glancing.

"No right, lassie! what do you mean?"

"I mean," said Jeanie, gravely, "*no* man has a right to say so of himself—to make his future depend on *any* fellow-creature: and then, for *you*—ye know *I* can give ye no right to say so, of myself—I'm so young—and there's my mother—I couldn't give my word to any, on-spoken* to her first."

"Well, I'll not hinder ye speakin' to your mother, I'm sure, when the time comes!"

"No, John, I know that. And then—even if *she* were pleased—that's not all," said Jeanie, and paused, with a sigh, for something else lay heavy on her heart.

"What then? ye've no other body's leave to ask?"

"No; but, John, ye're aware—" another pause.

"What is it, my dear? for any sake say on."

"Ye know—*we're not members of the same Church.*"

"Tut! is *that* all? Who thinks about Church, when folks likes each other?"

"Oh fie, John! Ye shouldn't treat it so."

"No? Ah, ye see, I'm a graceless sort o' a loon—ye'll have a heap to learn me. But it's true nae-the-less. Look at Leslie—he's *churchy* enough for anything: and my sister Kate had never been within the chapel-door when he married her!"

"No? but she joined afterwards, I've understood. And I would never leave my own Church."

"And who's askin' ye? Not I. As far as that goes,

* on-spoken,—lit. unspoken, without speaking to.

a member* of no Church myself, and I'd not care
 ch gin I were joinin' the Episcopal—if anybody was
 shin' that I should," he ended, looking insinuatingly
 to her face.

"Would ye really, John?"

"What would ye give me now, gin I said 'ay' this
 nute? Would ye give me a kiss your own self?"

"Not out *here*," said Jeanie demurely, for they were
 wing nearer to the frequented part of the town.
 and I don't think we should be speakin' so lightly
 out it. There's a good deal to think of, ye know."

"Ay is there!" said Jock with a long sigh. "A good
 deal to think of and a good deal to do, or I'm able to
 ep a wife, I doubt!"

Things were serious indeed when Jock talked of
 eeping a wife!" and the plain words made poor
 nie's cheeks burn, and tears stood in her eyes. She
 had gone so far, she felt; and yet there was no return-
 : and neither would she have returned. The kind
 f-compassionate friendly sentiment which she had
 had almost from their first acquaintance for this fair-
 ed, pleasant-tongued, good-natured, though unstable
 ath had ripened, unconsciously to herself, into that
 ng called "love;" which hitherto she had looked
 on in the abstract with a child's vague comprehen-
 on. She was no longer a child now.

"After all, ye see, there's nothing so very terrible said
 done!" John said next. "Nothing to alarm any one.

* In the sense of communicant.

Of course, as regards your own friends, ye'll do as ye like. Your friends don't know me, and I don't know them—and maybe they'll take your word for it, Jeanie, that I'm not the graceless reprobate, altogether, that some think me. But ye needn't raise a steer* where ye are stoppin' at present. Old Leslie will never notice anything unless its shoved under the very nose of him; but if he did, I don't believe he'd stand in the way of anything that was for my good. But the little auld wifie hates me like the very mischief—and she'd be givin' ye all sorts of cautions, I know fine, to have nothin' ado with me. And ye needn't fear I'd do anything to cause ye annoyance. After all I'm only asking ye to be kind and friendly to me, as ye've always been, in the meantime—just to let me *feel* that you care something for me: and ye'll come in about to see Agnes, now and again, and nae leave till office hours is over—so's me and you'll take a bit walk together siclike's we've done the night, before ye go home. Ye may promise me as much as that, Jeanie, my dear, without asking any one, surely!—it's no great thing to promise a poor fellow that would do anything in this world to pleasure you!"

He looked so wistfully in her face as he drew her arm tighter through his own that Jeanie's tender heart could not resist the appeal.

"I shall try, John," she said gently and gravely. "I will be your friend, as far as I may. I shall think of you—and especially at church, ye know."

* steer—stir, commotion.

"What! ye'll be thinkin' upon a worldly fella like ne, in place o' mindin' the sermon!" he said, with the sudden transition from earnestness to levity which was characteristic. "Think shame, Miss Ledingham!"

Jeanie's wise grey eyes looked a little rebuke as she answered: "Ye would need to understand one better nor that."

"I understand that ye're a precious deal too good for the like o' me!" he cried. "I'll think of you, I doubt, wherever I may be—'at kirk or at market,' as the song says—and in yon musty old office! Heigho! I wish I were a rich man like Leslie Esslemont! just for your sake, Jeanie, my dear."

"You must keep steady to your work, an' ye would grow a rich man, John," said Jeanie. "I expect that's the way Leslie's done."

"Ay. But I'm not made of the same stuff as Leslie. He's one of those fellows that can stick close—no matter how close—to any kind o' work—with a sort of a relish, and grow fat upon it. I get so weary after a while—and yon office work is so dreadful dull! But for you, Jeanie—just for your sake, won't I work! It'll be an object to me, such-like as I never had in all my life; and I'll stick in as steady to it as old Leslie himself, if only ye'll be a kind lassie to me, and keep true."

"I don't often go from my word, I think;" was Jeanie's demure answer. "Only ye mind, John, it's dependin' on my mother's wishes how it may be eventually—altho' I know she will never seek to hinder what's for my

happiness," she finished with a little quiver in her voice.

"Then it's all right, Jeanie, and I've no fears. I'll not need to come further with ye, I doubt—under *present* circumstances," he said with a little laugh. "But I'm fifty per cent. happier and better than ever I've been in my life, Jeanie, at this minute; and it's all because of you. Thank ye a thousand times for coming this night—and ye'll come again soon, won't ye?—to see poor Aggie, eh?"

"Is't Aggie I'll come and see?" said Jeanie, with a little irrepressible fun, at the last.

"Ay—just that! Give my love to poor little Katie when ye've a chance, and just as much's ye like to Mrs. Peter! There now, good night to ye, Jeanie, my *love*—hist ye, or ye'll have eyes at a' yon windies teeting at us—good night!"

Only a very warm, protracted hand-shake could be indulged in there, and so these lovers parted.

Poor Jeanie was conscious of a sensation of shyness, almost amounting to shame, such as she had never before experienced, as she pursued her homeward way hastily, for she was much later than she intended; and thought of encountering Aunt Annie's keen eyes and short plain speeches. Turning the last corner, she perceived her cousin's substantial figure, standing outside his own door smoking, as he often did in that quiet street in the warm summer evenings, to enjoy the open air. He turned a little as she came up, but there was nothing like displeasure or surprise at her

absence in his genial face and kind eyes, as he said, "Well, Jeanie! how's Agnes the night?"

"I think she's about her usual," Jeanie answered.

"John hasn't walked over with you," he went on, in the most innocent way possible. "I'd thought maybe he would, and if I'd seen him I was to just ask him in to see Katie a minute; but I doubt he wouldn't liked to come, poor lad!"

"He just came—*some* of the way," Jeanie replied, once without lifting her eyes in her usual manner.

"He did? Oh, then." That little adverb, or whatever it may be called, is a most expressive word in the mouths of Leslie's countrymen; ending a sentence as usually does abruptly, but leaving a world to be understood. But his face, as Jeanie did glance up before going in, was so placidly unconscious, so far from the least shadow of curiosity, and he looked so kind, that she felt it would be quite an easy matter, if necessary, to tell *him* everything—as she would have told it to her own father. And then came a sudden momentary recollection of the absurd observations of Mr. Smith and his friend. Ah! when *this* came to be known, nobody could talk any more of her being "Number Twa."

"Well, go your ways in to Katie," Leslie said. "She's in terrible high spirits the night, poor wee wifie, and needin' to tell you herself."

Jeanie went in. Aunt Annie was preparing Katie for her bed, and did not immediately notice Jeanie's entrance, but Katie called her eagerly as soon as she

caught sight of her. "Come here, Jeanie, till I tell *ye* this. What do *ye think*, Jeanie? Dr. Spence has been, and says I may try on to my crutches the morn—now!"

"Eh, but I am glad, pettie!" said Jeanie heartily, and thankful for the diversion from her own affairs, as she knelt down beside the child. "I'm sorry though I was not here when the doctor came," she added, turning a little doubtfully to Aunt Annie.

The old lady did not quite catch what she said. "Ay, he's terrible pleased wi' her. He says the good air and her rides has made her so much stronger."

"Yes; and I'll walk out now, Jeanie, and go to the church, and all, mind!"

"Ay; but not the first day, lassie, though it be Sunday," said Grannie. "Ye're only just to try through the floor at first, *ye know*, and nae fertigg* *yourself*. She doesn't know," she added in a sort of "aside" to Jeanie; "but she'll feel her limbies terrible weak when first she tries them doon, poor lammie."

But nothing would damp Katie's joyful anticipations; and when her father went to give her his good-night kiss, and bid her, in the old-fashioned nursery formula, "go sleep for siller to buy a coo," she seized his coat by both hands and dragged him down to her in a sort of ecstasy. "Oh Dada! I *wish* the morrow would come *quick*! Ye know I'll *walk* the morn!" Happy little Katie!

* fatigue.

CHAPTER XI.

A RED-LETTER DAY.

JEANIE was not sorry when the evening was over, and she was able to withdraw to her own attic and think over the wonderful new thing that had come to her—that was yet neither altogether new nor wonderful since it *had* come.

Not a word had been said, either directly or indirectly,

Aunt Annie—and yet Jeanie had an instinctive feeling that the old lady was not quite so friendly, that her manner was shorter than usual, towards herself. She could not help either the consciousness that she had gone out that night with Aunt Annie's warning against the Robbie mankind in general, and John Robbie in particular, ringing in her ears; and that she had come home pledged, as far as she was at liberty to pledge herself, to a friendship with John Robbie which ought to have but one termination. She was not to tell this to Aunt Annie: consequently she was obliged to feel a certain degree of guiltiness in the old lady's society, which to honest little Jeanie was a

sensation hitherto entirely unknown. She could not have confided in Aunt Annie, even if she would. Aunt Annie was prejudiced against all the Robbies—not only the elder sons, who might no doubt be undesirable—but she had no love even for Mrs. Robbie or poor Agnes; while she had evidently been jealous of the late Mrs. Leslie Esslemont. Perhaps she might have been hard to please in any case, in such an important matter as the choice of a wife to her only and much-beloved son. But knowing all this, Jeanie felt glad that at present, at all events, there was no need to make any confession to her.

Jeanie opened her attic-window which projected out in the roof, and leant upon the sill, and looked out in the dim gloaming of the long August evening across the intervening house-tops to the great dark-crested range of hill showing purply black against the clear sky. Beyond the houses, between them and the hill were those green banks of Murchie, beside which she and John Robbie had strolled, when he had told her that he loved her, and she had awakened to the consciousness that she loved him. What a wonderful thing it was! If it were indeed so, that his future was in her hands to shape as she would, that he looked to her for guidance and help and strength in the way, how warily she ought to walk—how carefully to adorn her profession—how gently but firmly to use influence! If it were the case that his three brothers had turned out ill, had disappointed their mo-

opes, what joy for Jeanie to feel that her love and her influence might be the humble means in a higher Hand to keep this young man—the youngest-born of his family—from following their bad example, and to win him to a more excellent way of faith and practice! Some such thoughts passed through her mind, as she sat and pondered—going over in memory all the words which he had said both earnest and light. It is not well for a woman to feel that hers is to be the guiding and upholding influence in love—that she must be the supporter rather than the supported—because it puts her to a certain extent in a false position, and makes her virtually the stronger instead of the weaker vessel. I am far from wishing to underrate a woman's influence, duly exercised; but it is a dangerous beginning in mutual love, when the woman perforce looks downward rather than upward to the object of her love. Yet some women seem to have an especial vocation for this kind of protecting, upholding love. Perhaps Jeanie was one of these, for there was a great deal of strength as well as simplicity in her nature: a certain amount of self-reliance, with all her humility: an element of the shrewdness supposed to be an especial characteristic of her nation, and a wisdom born of very guilelessness and straightforwardness.

John Robbie's nature was especially different from hers; but, however it had come about, she had been won by the qualities which were attractive in him, and which lay upon the surface very much, whereas she,

being true and of deep feeling, judged him by her own standard. Perhaps it was not altogether strange that she should have been attracted by him: a little flattered and uplifted besides by this first lovemaking, the first attentions paid to her—plain stupid little Jeanie, as she reckoned herself at home in comparison with her handsome clever sister. Ah! what would they all say at home when they heard that little Jeanie had actually got a sweetheart?

Of course Jeanie had every intention of telling all to her mother. But her intention did not lead her to sit down at once and write the whole story to her, as some might suppose. Jeanie and her mother did not correspond as easily and familiarly as many mothers and daughters. Margaret Ledingham did not belong to a letter-writing generation; and Jeanie, though she could write a very fair letter if need were, did not possess the fluent pen of her sister Helen. No; this matter was one that must be talked over with her mother at the first opportunity. She was to go home by-and-by for a holiday; and then would be the time to tell mother the whole story.

It was late before Jeanie, after much musing and many prayers, lay down in bed; and even then she lay awake for a long time—so much so that for a wonder she “slept in” on Sunday morning; and when on running hastily down-stairs she met Katie’s upturned face of bright hopefulness from her bed, Jeanie quite reproached herself for having temporarily forgotten what a

red-letter day this was to be in her little cousin's calendar.

Katie too had slept less than usual from her joyous anticipations, and consequently betrayed a little nervous restlessness bordering on impatience. Fortunately, however, it was her father's turn to stay with her during the forenoon. And Katie best knew what he was in those hours alone with her: how amusing he could be, what tales he could remember—above all how nicely he could talk about those sacred histories which are always the most enthralling to a child. But there was something even more wonderful to be rehearsed to-day, the responsibility of which Dada took upon himself. When Grannie and Jeanie came home from church they heard a very merry little voice indeed; and going in, beheld Katie standing up with her crutches in the middle of the room.

"Now, lassie, just one wee turnie to show them, and ye'll go back to the sofa," Leslie was saying. "I'm to put past the crutches for to-day. Isn't she real clever, mother?" he asked with earnest admiration, "and this the first time ever she's tried this size of crutch!"

Grannie and Jeanie admired the performance duly; but to the latter there was something in the *half* activity of the tiny figure, moving with what seemed such a tedious, painful effort, more pathetic than even Katie's usual state of passive helplessness.

"Ye havena been letting her try it long, Leslie?" said Grannie anxiously.

"Eh no, didn't commence till half an hour back; and I only let her wait just to show you and Jeanie so clever's she is!"

It was Jeanie's evening to stop at home, when Mrs. Ledingham and her son went to the six o'clock service. To-night Jeanie again chid herself for feeling a sort of restlessness in remaining. She could not help an instinctive presentiment that John Robbie would be at the "chapel" that evening—for the chance of a glimpse and a few words afterwards. And he would be disappointed—perhaps think that she had *chosen* to remain at home. She tried, however, to put selfish thoughts away, and to give her mind to her little charge.

She was to be rewarded as she hardly expected. For when the footsteps in the street outside began to give notice that the church was "coming out," Katie, suddenly starting up, exclaimed eagerly:

"That's them coming and Uncle Jock with them! Jeanie, Jeanie, give me my crutches and let him see me walking!—hist ye!"

"Not till Dada comes in, dear," said Jeanie, rather nervously, and much to Katie's displeasure; for the next moment the party were inside the door—Leslie and his mother, followed by Jock. He came in quietly, with a certain humility in his look and bearing, but Jeanie saw at once how his glance came over to her, with a subdued gleam of gladness. He was looking so nice too, she thought, in his dapper Sunday garments, and with that faint glow of pleasure on his face, as he

entered the house from which he had been for some time debarred—though by no means for the time that his kind-hearted brother-in-law had laid down as his term of probation. He only gave his hand to Jeanie silently, as he went up to the eager little niece.

“So ye’ve done wonders the day, pussie.”

“Eh yes, and I’ll soon let ye see what I can do, Uncle Jock. *Now* I may have them?” She turned and looked up to her father; and as Jeanie brought the crutches and helped her to rise, she went on: “I should have come to meet you at the door only Jeanie was so provokin’ and wouldn’t let me have the sticks till Dada came.”

“Jeanie’s a bad girl, I’m aware,” said Jock in a quiet tone of most complete unconcern, which nearly set Jeanie off in a hysterical laugh. Poor Jeanie’s whole face was suffused with a lively crimson, which she fondly hoped might be laid to the heat of the weather and anxiety about Katie; while that wicked Jock, who had perfect self-command of his own emotions, she felt sure was secretly enjoying her nervousness.

“We’d a fine sermon the night,” he said to her presently, after Katie’s performance had been duly admired and commended. “Pity ye hadn’t been there to hear it!”

“Ye liked it?” said Jeanie with a gratified smile. “And were the hymns nice?—you would like them.”

“Yes. They’ve a real good choir in yon place—far before ours, to my mind.”

"I believe that," said Jeanie; and the thought crossed her mind how happy and proud it would make her if she might one day see Jock—*her* Jock—among the white-vested men and lads, devoting his musical talents to the highest service of all.

Of course Jock remained to tea. But he did not presume in any way upon the forbearance of his brother-in-law, or upon Jeanie's kindness. He talked principally to Katie. Indeed Jeanie could have counted the words which passed between him and herself during the meal. It was pretty late when tea was finished and he rose to go home. Leslie said he would walk back with him for a stroll, and as he went to fetch his hat Jock said to Jeanie, in a sort of aside, "Will you be at the church next Sabbath night?"

"Likely I will," she answered. And then he shook hands and they parted, and that was all.

But that visit had been a happy surprise to Jeanie, and the restoration of her lover to his old place in their little circle seemed a good omen for the future.

"Oh Jeanie!" said little Katie, as Jeanie was put to bed that same night—"Oh Jeanie! hasn't it been a *happy* Sunday?"

"I think it has been that, dear," Jeanie answered quietly, as she kissed the little upturned face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLACK BULL.

IT was on that same warm summer Sunday that Helen Ledingham was wending her way home from morning service at the little "chapel" which she attended from the manse of Kessachie.

It was the "first Sunday in the month" (a festival strictly observed by Mr. Davidson the clergyman), but Helen had left after the sermon. She had three miles good to walk home, even by the shortest cut; and she had elected to walk across a spur of moor and some fields, though if she had chosen to wait for it she might have had a seat on the old Esslemonts' dog-cart, which had brought her. They, good old couple, never missed a "first Sunday," rain or shine; and many a lift had Helen gratefully accepted from them in her long dusty or muddy or snowy walks. But there was a serious drawback to Helen in these lifts, in the fact that they were as often as not shared by that ardent Churchman, Andrew Grant, the Monthoolie station-agent. Now it may seem a strange thing at first sight

why Miss Ledingham should object to sharing a friendly seat on a dog-cart with this worthy man. But the fact was that Andrew Grant's admiration for Miss Ledingham was becoming so very serious a matter, that Helen felt constrained to repress it by every means in her power; since she could not in any way reciprocate his feelings towards her.

Whether this had anything to do with Helen's ear start on her walk home to-day we will not too nicely inquire. For whatever reason, she looked rather wearied as she began her long walk. The church had been very full, with its summer congregation of families and visitors from Strathkessachie and the surrounding properties. Helen had been playing the harmonium again, during the temporary defection from that duty. Mrs. Davidson owing to an addition to the numerous family at the parsonage. She was rather tired and warm in consequence; and though she was too good a performer to be exactly nervous, she had been rather flustered by the many voices and eyes in the front seat that day. So perhaps it was not wonderful that she did not greatly relish the three miles home beneath the August sun beating down, under the sheltered side of the Strathkessachie hills, till she felt as if her black silk Sunday dress were burning her shoulders.

But it was not only from the present outward circumstances that Helen Ledingham's face wore now and then as not unfrequently a somewhat discontented expression. Under the calm exterior there was a good deal of rest-

lessness and chafing under her lot: though her feeling of duty towards her mother was strong enough to override it practically, and to keep her where she was, rather than idle at home. But she longed and pined for a change—of some sort. What she wanted she did not exactly know. It was certainly not to be mistress of Monthoolie station-house—though this honour she knew was at her feet. She supposed if some school, within reasonable distance of the Church privileges she had always claimed, should come within her reach, she would accept it. But deep down in Helen's heart—hardly acknowledged to herself, never spoken of to others—was a feeling that she was capable of, and intended for, something higher and better, some wider sphere. And so without complaining openly (except in an occasional half-playful grumble in her letters to her sister Jeanie) Helen went on in a dissatisfied, aggrieved frame of mind, doing her duties well to a certain extent, but with no love and little heart, and a sort of pitying contempt for those with whom she lived.

Her Uncle Argo was sharp enough to see that she was not contented; that she was, and felt herself to be, thrown away upon his family. And once or twice in speaking familiarly to the ladies of Strathkessachie he had exclaimed, in his inconsequent way: "Aw, Mrs. Leslie, couldn't ye hear of something for my niece Helen? for she's *far* too good for us, and she's thinking she should be away from the poor minister's housie and bairns, and learning French and music to more advanced

pupils." But though Mrs. Leslie was quite inclined to agree with the minister's own estimate of his niece, she had not hitherto been in a position to do anything for Helen's advancement.

Helen pursued her road somewhat languidly on the present occasion, but without any greater drawback than the heat of the day, till she came to the border of a grass field through which she must pass; when something caused her to make a decided pause. For in the middle of this open field, tethered by a ring through his nose, was a large black bull. Now Helen had all her life long, spite of being a farmer's daughter, had a certain dislike and dread of "beasts"—unlike Jeanie, who was on friendly and familiar terms with all the animals on the home-farm, could "ca' the kye" at any time without assistance, and milk with the best. Helen's fears and fancies had often raised the laugh against her at home in the old days, but they had never been cured. Perhaps there was a little excuse for her hesitation to-day in the fact that this bull, besides being a formidable-looking monster at best, was evidently in a perturbed state of mind, walking round and round at the length of his tether, and now and then standing still with a little suppressed low like distant thunder. The longer Helen looked at him the less she liked him; but the question was, how should she proceed? Either she must pass through his domain, or turn and go back by the long road, or climb over a stiffish bank and dyke, with a newly-cut

drain of some width on its further side. She chose at length the latter alternative—retrace her steps she felt she *could* not; so she began to climb the bank, but near the top found her dress suddenly entangled by a stubby bush growing beside it, so that she could neither go forward nor backward. In this somewhat undignified position she was struggling to release herself when she heard a voice behind her.

“Are you in difficulties, Miss Ledingham? Stop a minute; perhaps I can give you a hand.”

Looking up from her entanglements, Helen perceived a young gentleman hurrying up to her, whom she recognized as the Mr. Penreath who had called at the manse with the Strathkessachie party. Before she could say more than a breathless “Thanks,” he had freed her skirt from the bush, and was holding a hand to help her down.

“I thought it was you,” he said with a smile of some amusement, “but I could not make out what had happened to you on the top of the wall.”

“No—I dare say,” said Helen, feeling rather foolish. “It was just the bull—I was unwilling to pass him—but I was going out of my way.”

“What, that fellow? He does look rather an ugly customer, but he is tethered, you see. Will you mind if I walk through with you, on this side?—for there is a nasty jump for you on the other, you see.”

“Oh, no—thank you,” said Helen, feeling that her fear had been somewhat magnified; and as her friend

in need placed himself between her and the object of her alarm she grew almost ashamed of it. They passed through the bull's field safely and quickly, and then Mr. Penreath said :

"There, you see, he has not molested us. I am sorry you had such a fright, though."

"It was stupid," Helen said, rather shyly. "It's strange, but I always had a great dislike to walk amongst any kind of cattle."

"And you have such droves of them here," he said. "Some of our party were greatly exercised the other day by coming upon a great herd in the woods, with the smallest possible boy in charge." And then he added: "Can you tell me if I am on the right road for Strathkessachie? I believe there is a way round; but I have only been here once or twice shooting, and I was not sure."

"Yes, you are all right so far. The road turns up below that small steading in front of us."

"Thanks. I wanted a walk, I do so hate driving from church, and the close carriage is intolerably hot. You are going the same road, I see?"

"Yes, as far as the corner. Then I go down, and you go up."

"I see. Well, we may as well walk together so far, and you will kindly put me on the right road when we reach the farm buildings."

Helen was nothing loth. He was a more interesting companion by far than the station-agent: indeed, from

On the first day of their meeting, Helen had been somewhat struck by this young fellow, who had spoken so civilly, and thanked her so courteously for her music; though there was really nothing at all remarkable about him. He was moderately tall, and strongly built; with fair hair, good but rather marked features, honest blue eyes, and a much-tanned face—and being of the complexion that tans very red-brown, his hair and moustache looked the lightest part about him. He had a kindly expression and an easy frankness of manner that put most people at their ease with him at once. Helen's imagination possibly gave a tone of sympathy to his words of which he doubtless was himself unconscious.

"How far is it for you to walk to the church from the manse?" he presently asked.

"A good three miles. But I only come this road in fine weather."

"It's a long walk, isn't it? You must be tired. It's very good of you to play the harmonium—so few people like to do it."

"I have only done it a few times."

"Jolly little church, isn't it?"

Helen had never heard the word "jolly" applied to a place of worship, so she answered in perhaps more correct phraseology that it was "very neat."

"Yes. I was hardly ever in such a small one before. I should think you must rather wish for a change of airson sometimes, though—don't you? Old Davidson has such a terrible stick."

"He is not just a very great preacher, but he is very earnest."

"Oh yes, I dare say. Have you always been Protestant—no, Church of England—what do they call it here?"

"Episcopalian? Yes; the most of our family are Episcopals."

"And do you never go to hear Mr. Argo? Harry Leslie took me one day. What a wonderfully fluent preacher he is!"

"Yes, I have heard him. I do not much care for him in the pulpit."

"Do you practise a good deal?" was the next rather abrupt question.

"On the piano? No, indeed I do not now, I have so little time to sit steady to it."

"I wonder how you can play that music of Chopin's so well. It is awfully difficult, I know. Do you play a great deal of it?"

"I have just two bits by Chopin."

"Do you know I have been thinking I shall ask you a great favour? Would you play me that 'Fantasia' again some day, if I come to the manse? It is such a favourite of mine."

"I'm sure I will be most happy," said Helen. "I'm aware I don't do it justice though. I would like to hear some good performer give it."

"I think you play it uncommonly well," he said. "You give the spirit and expression, somehow. There is so much imagination in Chopin's music—don't you

think so?—and Schubert's. Can you play any of the 'Sleepless Nights'?"

"I had a book with some of them when I was taking lessons."

"I think one or two of them are perfect. I should so like to hear you play them. I can't get my sister to play those things; she always says they're too troublesome—but she's very lazy, and won't practise." They had now reached the divergence of their roads, and he stopped. "Now this is my way, I think?—so I must wish you good-morning, and thank you."

"Thank *you* for assisting me," Helen said as they joined hands; and then he raised his hat politely, adding with a little laugh: "I hope you won't meet with any more wild animals! Good-bye."

That was all. Helen walked on alone, but with a much more lively step than she had done at the beginning of her journey. It was not that the sun was less hot, or the road easier than before; but some other influence had quickened her pulses and raised her spirits. It was a pleasure certainly to be spoken to in a way something above Andrew Grant's platitudes, or her uncle's vulgar jokes; or even good old Jamie Esslemont's trite observations about the weather and the crops. How nice it must be to live amongst people who talked like that, and entered into the refinements of art! Who was there at the manse, or in the circle of Helen's ordinary acquaintance, that understood or cared anything about Chopin's imagination, and the 'Sleepless Nights'?

And then Helen thought how kind and courteous and helpful Mr. Penreath had been when she was stuck on the top of the dyke. Any one of her own male friends would have had a hearty laugh at her before he held out a hand to help her—except perhaps poor Andrew Grant. This young man treated her with as delicate courtesy as if she had been an earl's instead of a farmer's daughter. Unconsciously at last Helen found herself counting the days before another Sunday, and wondering if he would happen to walk that way again. He was coming to the manse to hear her play, at any rate. Which of those 'Sleepless Nights' could she manage to remember? She fell to thinking over the half-forgotten notes in her mind. And so she found herself, in a sort of dream, at the manse-gate—and at the thought of her Uncle Argo and the kind of conversation that would prevail at the mid-day meal a sort of utter contempt and disgust came over Helen; and she took her seat among them with even more than her usual stateliness.

About the same moment Horace Penreath, coming in just in time to sit down at the luncheon-table at Strathkessachie with the rest, said to the cousin beside him: "I didn't think it would have taken me so long to walk across. I'm rather late, I'm afraid; but I've been extricating the extensively-educated young lady out of a difficulty."

"No! What do you mean, Horace?" said Kitty Leslie.

"Well, as I was crossing a field, I saw a little way n front a very swell young person, in black silk, all n a heap on the top of a wall. Coming up I found t to be the Argo governess, who had been frightened y one of your favourite 'polls,' or 'hummlies,' or whatever they are called in the vulgar tongue, and in rying to climb over had stuck fast. I gave her a hand down and the benefit of my protection through the field—and we conversed most amicably on the beauties of Chopin."

"Horace!"

"Yes—why not? And do you know it's really awfully good of her—she walks three miles and back to attend her own church, and plays the harmonium into the bargain. I should like to see any of you girls doing that."

CHAPTER XIII.

LUNCHEON AT THE LAIRD'S.

"HELEN, see this."

And Mrs. Argo placed the following note before her niece.

"Strathkessachie, 25th Aug.

"DEAR MRS. ARGO,

"We shall be very glad if you and Mr. Argo, with your two eldest girls, will come to luncheon with us on Tuesday, at two o'clock. We shall hope to see your niece, Miss Ledingham, also; and my young people remind me to beg that she will bring some music.

"With kind regards,

"Yours sincerely,

"KATHARINE LESLIE."

Helen's face coloured with a slight glow of pleasure as she read. "Will you go, Aunt Elsie?"

"I think we will, if papa is for it—which likely he will be. Mrs. Leslie has some little nieces with her too, so it will be a fine ploy for the children. Ye'll need to practise your best pieces, Helen. Mrs. Leslie

"I'll maybe be to find ye some more advanced pupils : though I will not say but I shall be sorry for myself when the time comes for ye to fly away."

"There's no word of that at present, aunt," Helen said.

"No." And Mrs. Argo sighed a little as she went to bid her husband.

There was no fear of his being unwilling to accept the invitation, if disengaged. He enjoyed a good luncheon, and hearing himself talk, at Strathkessachie or anywhere else, and seldom refused an invitation.

There was likewise great excitement among the young Argos when the news was proclaimed. And the intervening days were greatly devoted to a furbishing up of best dresses and hats : on the part of Helen, to practising Chopin with assiduity.

At last the wished-for day came. The five were to walk to the laird's house—excepting Mrs. Argo, who rode Fissie, with a large plaid thrown round her on the saddle. Arriving at Strathkessachie they were ushered into the drawing-room in all their finery, feeling very stiff and uncomfortable—all except the minister who was never put out. There they found a large party, though only the friends staying in the house : Mrs. Leslie and her sister Mrs. Ferguson, with two nice girls about Elsie's age ; the three Leslie young ladies, and Miss Penreath ; also the laird, but no other gentlemen were in the room at first. Maude Leslie took charge of Elsie and Maggie, endeavouring to make them fraternize with her young

cousins; but the little Argos sat down resolutely on two chairs close to the door, and only replied by a half-choked "Oh yes" or "Oh no" to any advance on the part of their entertainers. Presently the door opened, admitting a neighbouring proprietor and his wife, accompanied by Mr. Davidson, the Episcopal clergyman of the moorland chapel, to whom they had given a lift in their carriage. A little time passed in the usual small talk, and then the luncheon-gong sounded. So Mr. Penreath was not to be of the party, Helen thought with some disappointment, and it was not he who had desired that she should bring her music!—but just as they were all rising to adjourn to the dining-room, two young men in shooting costume walked hastily in, being Horace and his cousin Harry Leslie. There were some little apologies and exclamations of "Just in time!" and so on, and the party trooped in to luncheon.

There was some slight difficulty in seating and arranging all the little folks at the large round table, but it was quite by chance that Helen found herself between Kitty Leslie on one side, a little Ferguson on the other, and beyond her again, Horace Penreath. They had not spoken before, but as he sat down Horace turned and gave her a good-natured recognition. "Well, Miss Ledingham, have you had any more encounters with wild beasts since our last adventure?" he said, speaking across his little cousin.

Helen was angry with herself for only being able to emit as frigid a "No" as any of her pupils; but May

Ferguson looked up and asked, "What was that, Horace?"

"Well, I think I must refer you to Miss Ledingham, though I don't know that 'that' was anything very much. Eh?"—to an appeal from the head of the table—"take the pie? Yes, certainly"—and for the next few minutes Horace was quite engrossed in laboriously dispensing that popular dish, a grouse pie. It was not till later on in the course of the meal that he addressed Helen again. "I hope you have not forgotten your promise to me, Miss Ledingham?"

"I think not," said Helen, rather shyly.

"I hope to hear some of my favourites by-and-by. I don't think the piano here is a very good one; but my aunt only gets it out by the month while she is here—and you haven't much choice in the country. Myself I think there is nothing like Broadwood: though my sister always stands up for Erard."

Helen felt that she was getting a little out of her depth, so she was silent.

"Broadwood is best for singing to, I think. By the way, do you sing at all?"

"Just a very little. I never sing in company at all."

"I think you will like my cousin Blanche Leslie's singing. She does some of the little German songs so well. Do you know German?"

"I commenced to it once for a short time, but was unable to carry it on. I have often wished I could. But when you are preparing for the exams, there are

so many branches that are *necessary* that ye have no time for any others," Helen finished rather awkwardly.

"Ah! those exams! I have had my share of them—and right glad I shall be when the last is over."

Just then Mr. Argo's voice came out very loudly across the table, in the midst of some story he had been telling to the laird—"as if I, as minister of the parish, from my place in the pulpit, were to say"—but what it was all about neither Helen nor her neighbour had the least idea. Helen was silent: feeling one of those thrills of dislike towards her uncle, mingled almost with shame at being connected with him. He was so forward, so presuming, she thought—and that broad vulgar accent, coarser than that of many of the poorer country folks, how could he be so fond of parading it among English ladies and gentlemen! What must Mr. Penreath think?

Mr. Penreath had stopped speaking, and listened for a moment or two with a little twinkle of amusement to what Mr. Argo was to say or had said "from his place in the pulpit," then he said smiling to Helen, "I'm sorry I lost that. I'm sure Mr. Argo was telling some capital story to my uncle."

"I think," said Helen, with a rather scornful smile, "my uncle makes up some of his stories."

"Do you know," Horace went on, "when I first came here I couldn't understand the people one bit? I am getting better now. But the keeper has lots of words that I can't make out. And that old

fellow at the gate—the bailiff—I can't understand him yet."

The subject was growing a little too personal for Helen quite to relish; for though she felt that she "spoke very well" herself, she knew that some of her nearest relations were by no means faultless in their English. Old Esslemont, however, was no relation; and so she admitted with a little laugh that he was quite an old-fashioned body.

"And I make such absurd mistakes sometimes," Horace went on, "when I try to use their words. The other day, you know—we were talking about the river, and you know that word they have for a flood—a 'spate'?—well I *could* not remember it, and I said to Andrew the keeper, 'If a *stook* would only come down, we should get some fish!' You should have seen how he stared; and the way Harry Leslie chaffed me all the evening!"

Helen could and did laugh heartily at this, and the idea of a "stook"—*i.e.* sheaf of corn—having so happy an effect. They had not much more conversation: I dare say this, that has been recorded, seems little worth the record. But somehow every little word and sentence stereotyped itself in Helen's memory. It is so sometimes—the most insignificant remark will make itself remembered if spoken by some one who interests us, when far more important sayings are forgotten. Helen felt sorry when they rose from the table and the party became scattered.

When was the music to come off? She began to grow very hot and nervous about it; and it was a relief to find that going out was the order of the day. Some of the party fell to playing lawn-tennis, but as neither Helen nor her cousins had learned the accomplishment, they were only lookers-on. The children had thawed somewhat; and when he was tired of holding forth, Mr. Argo's changeful mood led him to play with them, finally racing about in an impetuous manner round the garden, with his coat-tails flying and his hat on the back of his head. Then Helen remembered that the intricacies of tennis prevented Mr. Penreath from observing him. That was a pretty game to watch from a little distance, behind some of the other guests. Helen watched it; Horace and his sister on one side, Kitty Leslie and a lady visitor on the other. She had not often, indeed, had an opportunity of watching the game played. She was sorry when a general gathering of the party towards the house disturbed her enjoyment of the sight—and then something was said of tennis. But when at length Helen was set down by some of the ladies at the piano, Horace Penreath was still only two or three games deep in his set.

She began to play; but in a lifeless sort of way, feeling as if she had not been practising all the while for *this*. No doubt when the tennis-players came her turn would be over, and some other performance—that cousin of whom he had told her, who played so well. The piece she had begun was a fantasia

a Scotch air—not one of the chosen pieces. But as she had nearly finished—she was playing by heart—there were steps outside, and the door opened and several people came in. Helen's back was to the door; she could not *see* who entered, but something made her instinctively feel that the sympathetic listener had come at last. Else why, when she had finished the fantasia, almost before any remarks were made, did she begin at once, with no pause between the two, that one of the *Nuits Inquiètes* that she had learnt at school, that she had been rubbing up in memory daily for so many days?

When this too was finished, Horace Penreath walked up to the piano. "Thank you for keeping that till I came," he said, so that only she could hear. "Now we will have Chopin."

She had nothing to do but to obey. And she felt as if she could willingly have played all day. It mattered nothing that her uncle was in full flow of talk again, under cover of the piano—having little respect for his niece's performance. It mattered not that others were talking also—as company do talk let whoever will play to them so long as it is *only* playing, while every breath is hushed for the feeblest note of the most incapable singer. Horace Penreath was standing by the piano, drinking in every note; and presently he turned over the page as she played, with an exactness which showed that he could read correctly also. Perhaps Helen had never played so well in her life as she did that piece then.

It was finished : and with the sense of having occupied the music-stool too long Helen rose, shyly enough now, and drew into the background. Mrs. Leslie commended her performance in a good-natured, ordinary sort of way, but Helen only heard the "Thanks—you have given me a great treat," which Horace uttered as she passed him. Then other performers came to the front. Some one asked for a song ; and Blanche Leslie was being urged forward. She was the youngest of the three girls—very young, scarcely out of the school-room but she had a pretty voice, and a good deal of confidence. Helen did not care for the song particularly as she could neither distinguish nor understand the words. Then there was a little laughing and teasing amongst the young people, and she heard some one say that "Horace must sing now." Horace looked rather shamefaced, but finally consented—"if Blanche would play." Blanche appeared nothing loth ; and then followed a turning over of music and choosing and chattering which lost a good deal of time. However, the song began at last, and was listened to with due respect. It was a simple little Scotch ballad, and very simply sung, without the slightest conceit or pretence. Horace had a correct ear, but a voice of little depth or richness and he did not lay himself out to be considered a great singer ; nor did he sing this particular song with anything like the expression which a Scotchman born would have put into it. But to Helen's ear there was something infinitely sweet and pathetic in the tones, and

the song he chose. When he had finished he turned round with the same half-deprecating look of genuine modesty, and for one moment Helen caught his eye, involuntarily. It was as if he had glanced, half-timidly, to see what she thought of his performance.

She coloured very much—almost as Jeanie might have done—and turned away. It so chanced that they had no more conversation: for tea and coffee were presently handed round, and then the party began breaking up. Mrs. Argo requested to be allowed to order her pony: the farewells were said; and the manse party found themselves trudging homewards, Mrs. Argo and her steed at their head.

The young people were in great spirits, chatting over the day's amusements; and Mr. Argo was in high good-humour also, for he felt conscious of having made an impression on the laird's company; and so perhaps he had, though hardly as he intended.

"Yon's a nice-like lad," he observed to his wife as they were nearing home. "I mean the laird's nephew,—him that was so taken up with our Helen's music."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Argo. "I thought he seemed a real pleasant young man."

"And I suppose ye'll have heard all that's to hear about him—what he is and what he's doin'—eh, mamma?"

"Deed, no—what way would I be likely to hear that?"

"What way? Why I thought you ladies always got

everything out of each other," said the minister jocosely. "I'll wager Helenie's got it all by now, for as demure a lady as she looks."

"I, uncle!" said Helen, turning round rather indignantly. "What would *I* be in the way of hearing

"Dear me, ye seem terribly offended at the idea, because of ye! Well, I'm not seekin' information from ye, I've been hearin' from Stra'kessachie all that *I* want needin' to know."

Helen walked on, perhaps a shade paler than usual but betrayed nothing of interest in her uncle's words. Mrs. Argo, however, said, "And what then have ye been hearing about him?"

"Well, not just so very much. He's an only son—and eddicated for the ministry. I wouldn't have said he was just so very parson-looking, would ye now?"

"No," said Mrs. Argo. "He looks more like a military man, to me."

"Well, let him look it or no, that's his destination. He's very fond of sport of all sorts—but some of the English clairgy are just as great hands at the gun as other men. The laird tells me he's a good fellow of heart, and they hope he'll just quiet down by-and-by when he gets into harness. I doubt we'll find him settling down one of these days, in a sweet little English parsonage, embosomed in trees, by the side of a caflowing streamlet—" and then Mr. Argo began to speak in his peculiar fashion the old poem—

"Mine be a cot beside the rill ;
The beehive's hum shall soothe mine ear"—

till he came to—

"And Nellie, at her wheel, shall sing
In russet gown and kirtle blue."

"Papa!" cried Maggie, who had learnt the piece,
"it's *Lucy*, not Nellie."

"Eh, Lucy is it? I beg her pardon, but maybe
Nellie suits the verse as well."

No one made any rejoinder, and a little after, as they turned in at their own gate, the minister began again, in his curious inconsequent way: "The Reverend Horace Penreath," speaking the words slowly and distinctly—"how do ye like it, eh? We'll have the Reverend Horace Penreath preachin' at yon bit Puseyit' meetin'-house across the muir, one of these days. I wouldn't wonder, if I could get my pulpit filled for a Sabbath, but I were to go and hear him—eh, Helenie? I say, Helenie, when's he coming to get another music lesson?"

But Helen hardly heard the last sortie, for with a lofty step and a countenance of ineffable scorn she went on into the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS SPENCE'S NEWS.

THE summer and autumn months passed on with little event to Jeanie. Rather perhaps because the great event of her young life—the awakening to the consciousness that she loved and was beloved again—had come to her, and henceforth all other incidents were to take their colour more or less from this. But outwardly there was no change, either in herself or her circumstances. She went on with her daily duties conscientiously and steadily—perhaps with increased inward serenity born of that happy secret which she carried. For it was still a secret to those around and nearest to her. John Robbie came and went, and met her and talked to her as usual. Only he made a frequent point of attending the chapel evensong, with Leslie's household, on Sundays. And sometimes—these were her red-letter days—Jeanie went over to Mrs. Robbie's, and sat with her and Agnes till Jock came home to tea; after which he would escort her home, by the bend of Murchie—not the shortest way. On those evenings

the boy and girl enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and had many wise and weighty talks. But they kept their courting, properly so called, well out of the way of the "old people,"—as Jock sometimes disrespectfully bracketed Leslie and his mother together.

So it came about that little Jeanie, to whom the burden of her secret seemed for the first few days almost too great to be borne, had begun to forget that there was any secret at all: everything went on so naturally and smoothly.

One fair September evening both Jeanie and Katie had gone out to tea with Mrs. Robbie. Katie was getting quite an independent little personage now. She had been to church several times: so it was nothing to her to be "hurled" in her perambulator as far as her grandmother's, as her crutches made her independent of carrying now. Mrs. Robbie and Agnes were, in their own phraseology, "fit to eat her"—they could not make enough of this only little representative of their lost one. Uncle Jock was always her devoted slave; and so she had a fine time of it, sitting in the best cushioned chair, and feasting on all the jam and short-bread and varieties of cakes that her loving relatives could collect around her—feasting, that is to say, as far as her slender appetite permitted, for Katie was neither greedy nor fanciful. She made them all laugh by her funny little old-fashioned sayings, Grannie Robbie's laughter being of that doleful kind that leads to tears and headshaking; while Agnes sat looking at her with a sort of worship

in her eyes, ejaculating, "Dear pettie!" or "Pretty lamb!" now and again to herself. And so, while they were worshipping Katie, Jock had opportunities of paying more particular attention to the object of *his* worship; though he was careful to avoid the scrutiny of Katie's sharp eyes. But the five were a happy, and for the most part a merry party, both over their tea, and over the music, chat, and jokes that followed it.

And while this was going on at Mrs. Robbie's, Mrs. Ledingham, who was stirring about in her kitchen, found her *tête-à-tête* with Baubie the servant-lass suddenly broken in upon by the not too welcome apparition of Miss Spence.

"What, all alone, Mrs. Ledingham? Even Katie flown?" she exclaimed, as Grannie, dusting her meal-whitened hands—she had been superintending a baking—ushered her into the empty living-room.

"Yes, I'm all my lone the night, Miss Spence. Will ye please to sit down?"

"Thanks: well, I shall quite enjoy a quiet 'haver' with you, for I don't often get such a treat; but still I wanted to enlist Katie, and your great-niece, too, in a little matter I am much taken up about in the mean time—our coming bazaar for the new Town Hall. I know I may count on Mr. Esslemont's kind sympathy. But the fact is, I allowed myself to be persuaded to take half a table—with my sister Mrs. Bruce, you know—and I want Katie's help; some of her pretty knick-knacks are just the very things to sell—and made by her,

so interesting. And now tell me—where is my birdie flown?"

Tell, she's just over to tea with her grandmother; that all."

Yes, just that. And Jeanie Ledingham too, of course. By the way, I suppose that bird will be flying a long, eh?"

She's going home again in Christenmas for a bit," said Miss Spence. "It's a gey while since she's seen her mother, dear."

Yes, of course, that's a preliminary. But I was expecting another sort of flying away. And indeed, Mrs. Ledingham, I was thinking I would need to congratulate you and your son too, I suppose—you will both be pleased about it!"

Forgive my pardon, Miss Spence, I don't know what you be mintin' * at," said Grannie bluntly.

Oh Mrs. Peter, Mrs. Peter! that is too bad, to try to mystify me!" said Miss Spence, shaking some curls that hung behind her ears. "Ye see, I know better!"

What, there's some kens their neighbors' affairs better than they div themselves," said the old lady; "but it's me to guess your meanin', mem, and that's the best way."

Tell, it is strange, Mrs. Ledingham, for surely it's well known that John Robbie and your niece have got it up?"

* hinting.

"John Robbie and my niece! Nothin' o' the ki Miss Spence!—and so ye may tell them as told ye."

"Well, Mrs. Ledingham, dear," said the lady, a little nervously, "I don't often listen to idle gossip; what we see with our own eyes I think we're justified in believing."

"And may I ask, then, Miss Spence, what it is that ye've seen, to justify one sayin' sic a thing?"

"Oh well,"—and Miss Spence bridled a little; "I've seen them walkin' together, themselves, beside the burn—not once nor twice, on these fine summer evenings. No doubt they did not know I saw them," said Miss Spence with a giggle; "but I *have* seen lovers before. And then ye know it's quite the talk amongst us, that he's leaving the church, and most often at Mr. Fyfe's chapel of nights—and of course there must be some attraction—and him so often here. But indeed I thought it seemed such a happy prospect both for the girl and for John, poor fellow—and never doubted that you had it all made up yourselves."

"Well, as for that, Miss Spence, ye know your Jock's aye been comin' in about here, whenever he was at home, long or ever Jeanie stopped wi' us. And as for the church, as often as no Jeanie's at home in the evenin's when he's there. I'm aware, she's fond of Agnes, and often runs over o' afterneens to sit wi' her, but doesna follow, gin she does this, that she's made it up wi' Agnes' brother."

"Well, it's not Agnes that walks up and down

bends of Murchie with her, anyway," said Miss Spence, facetiously.

"May be no. A young lass and lad may take a walk at a time—specially when he's a near connection o' her own friends—and naething more to speak o'—but some folks must aye be speakin'."

"Well, Mrs. Ledingham, I'll not say more if it offends you, I'm sure. Ye know ye may depend on me for not carryin' idle tales—and papa is so very particular—of course in his position as a medical man he hears so much—it would never do."

Yes; Mrs. Ledingham knew well that was the only influence which kept Miss Spence from being a promiscuous scandal-monger; but she contrived, in spite of her good honest "papa," to do a good deal in that line as it was.

Having exhausted the subject of Jeanie and her lover; and left a sting in the old lady's bosom spite of her incredulity, Miss Spence began upon the bazaar and other topics, and sat talking on till Grannie began preparing her son's tea. Then at last she made a feint of jumping up to go, sitting down immediately at the offer of a cup of tea, having heard a step outside. "No; I must not go just *immediately* Mr. Esslemont comes in! that would seem so rude. I have not seen him either to speak to this while. And it is important to me to enlist his sympathies, for you know it is quite the '*ong-di*' that he is to be our provost next election—and, of course, his support would be everything. Ah!

Mr. Esslemont, how are you? We were just talking about you, weren't we, Mrs. Peter?"

Poor Leslie's ingenuous countenance fell several degrees when he perceived the visitor. He could never be otherwise than courteous and civil, however; and Miss Spence was delighted as she found herself in for a regular tea with the two; which was just what she wanted.

"Now it's really too bad!" she began presently. "Both your young people flown and left you alone—why couldn't you have come and spent the evening with poor papa?" putting her head on one side musingly. "Papa is really wearying for a chat with you."

"He's very good, Miss Spence," said Leslie. "But I think he knows I don't care for going out in the evening."

"Oh yes, he *knows*," said the lady mischievously; "but do *you* know, he disapproves of it very much—says you are getting quite recluse habits, and it's very bad for your health! But it's no use. You know ye'll have to come out into public life very soon, you bad man," shaking her curls at him, "or I'm very much mistaken. Isn't it so, Mrs. Ledingham?"

"I suppose my son will do what's required of him," said Grannie shortly, Leslie remaining silent, though he knew to what she alluded. He did not care to discuss with Miss Spence his probable elevation to the provostship of Abermurchie. And then Miss Spence began with the bazaar all over again; and talked and fidgett

and ogled and bantered till poor Leslie was almost distracted. At last when tea was discussed he rose, saying to his mother that he thought he "would away out and meet Katie."

Upon which Miss Spence discovered that it was time for *her* to depart also: so finding that he could not escape from her out of doors, Leslie changed his mind so far as to wish her good-bye at the door.

When she had at length gone he turned to his mother with a voluminous sigh. "Yon's an awful woman!"

"Awat is she," said Grannie. "And what div ye think is her latest bit of news, no'?"

"'Deed, I'll not attempt to guess."

"Well," said Mrs. Ledingham, lowering her voice, "she says that Jock Robbie and our Jeanie are to make a match of it. Did ye ever hear the like?"

"Well, if it's true, it's the best thing I've heard of Jock."

"Gude! Leslie, ye dinna mean 'at ye'd approve of it?"

"Well, I don't know what I would do to disapprove of it."

"My be here!—and do ye think it's likely to be true then?"

"'Deed; mother, ye're more needin' to be in the way o' knowin' these things than I. Any way, if it be the case, it'll just be the savin' of Jock."

"Jock! it's aye Jock with you, man; but ye

dinna consider the lassie: is it at all a good thing for her?"

"I suppose she'll just need to please herself—like all others."

"Well, I do say it would be a pity to see a right brought up, good, thrifty, honest girl like Jean Ledingham throwin' herself away upon the like of a feckless, shiftin', idle crater like Jock, that'll tire o' her, 's like as no, after a month or twa! And ye know fine, Jock'll take a dram like his brothers—and his head canna stand it—and he's that waefu' he canna haud himself out o' temptation's way, gin he just go to a bit market—ye're pairfitly aware o' that, Leslie."

"Hoot, mother! poor Jock's not a' thing that's bad tho' he has slipped once or twice! And I can tell ye something's wrought a change in him of late, whether Miss Spence be a true prophet or no. He's stuck to his work real steady; I've not had a fault to him this long while. And if it be the case that little Jeanie's influence is doing it, it's a splendid thing for him, and not just that bad for her—say what ye like."

"Well, I scarcely feel I could reconcile it to my conscience, gin I knew such a thing were goin' on, and not interfere—though for that maitter I *have* spoke my mind to the girl, mair than once—and her Margaret Ledingham's bairn. Think ye Margaret would approve no', gin she kent it herself?"

"Margaret's bairn must settle her affairs with her own mother herself. *We* can't tell but she does know

way I really don't see that we have any right to here, one way or another, in the matter; and if *you* e, mother, we'll drop it."

And then Leslie turned to the open door, adding, "It's them coming."

Back, leisurely pushing the perambulator, Jeanie was walking beside him in demure contentment, and Katie was waiting for both. Her father went and met her, saying, "Well, my queenie, ye've had a fine outing the day. Are ye tired?" bending down anxiously to the child's face.

"Oh no, Dada!—and we've had such a lovely tea, and so much fun! and Uncle Jock wanted to take us round by the burn, only Jeanie said I must come *straight* home." "Jeanie was quite right," said Leslie in a tone of high commendation which quite compensated Jeanie for having foregone that delightful round by bends of the burn. "And now haste ye in, for your handies are cold—that's a lady!" as Katie seized her crutches and went pit-a-pat off into the house, after kissing her father first. "Will ye come in a minute, Jock?" he called.

"Not to-night, thanks." And as the elder man's face met his for a moment, Jock cast down his shifty eyes, and a pink flush mantled in his boyish cheeks. Instinctively in that moment Jock felt that his mother-in-law had divined his secret.

CHAPTER XV.

CINDERELLA.

AFTER the unwonted piece of dissipation in the luncheon at Strathkessachie, life at the manse went on very much the same as usual.

Perhaps it was natural that Elsie and Maggie, for a day or so, should have a little difficulty in settling to their usual avocations in the schoolroom, after the much-talked-of treat. But there should have been no reason why that sober and stately young person, Miss Ledingham, should feel such an increased dislike and distaste to her duties as she was conscious of; and which unfortunately manifested itself in a want of heart, and a pettish impatience with her pupils, which caused them to complain that Helen was "so cross."

Helen had several walks across the moor, both to and from church, after this; but she never again "met in" with Horace Penreath—or, for the matter of that, with the black bull, whose quarters had been shifted. But poor Andrew Grant, whose rides on the Esslemont dog-cart had lost their charm, took to the cross country

h again; and on one of these Sundays, having so to
ak driven poor Helen to bay, made her a most full,
mn, and ceremonious offer of his hand and heart.
Helen had nothing for it but to refuse him absolutely
hopelessly. She was not heartless, and she felt for
a; still she was provoked with the man for not
ing the many hints she had given him and for
aging matters to a crisis; and so it is to be feared
spoke coldly and severely, and sent the poor fellow
ek to his little lonely house with a very sore heart,
d strong intentions of taking the first opportunity of
taining a "shift" to some other line of railway.

It was the day after this Sunday that Helen, spending
few moments of leisure in trying to train and fasten
to something like tidiness a picturesque climbing
se-tree beside the manse-door, heard a horse's step
the avenue, and turning her head, saw Kitty Leslie
her hill pony. She went forward with her usual
affected self-possessed courtesy. "How do you do,
Miss Leslie? I will look for Mrs. Argo directly."

"Oh don't mind; I really did not want to trouble Mrs.
Argo so early—in fact it was you I wanted to see, Miss
Edingham—and if I may just speak to you here, I won't
t off—the others are waiting for me in the village."

"Certainly," said Helen.

"It was—I wanted to ask a favour of you," said
tety, a little breathlessly. "We want very much to
; up a little dance, at the house—just among our-
ves and the Greenhaughs, and a few friends staying

with us, before my cousins leave. It's not a regular ball, you know, only it's such a help to have a little dancing in the evening. And—you play dance-music so beautifully—we thought—mamma thought I might ask you—if you would mind, if you could arrange to come up and play for us? I can play a little—but none of us can play reel-music—and it would be *such* a help if you would."

"I could easily do that," said Helen in the most matter-of-fact way possible, but inwardly her heart gave a leap. It had not escaped her that Kitty had said "before my cousins go."

"Could you really? It's awfully nice of you; and Mrs. Argo won't mind?"

"I don't think she's likely to mind. What day would it be?"

"Monday, we thought—this day week. Mr. and Miss Penreath leave on Tuesday, so we can't put it off any longer. And it will not be very late, you know. If you will come up about nine—and have some tea—and then mamma thought you mightn't mind taking a bed at Esslemont's at the lodge—we're *quite* full, or we would ask you to sleep at the house; but as you know them, you might not mind—and I can easily arrange that. You must not go home all the way at night of course."

"Thanks," said Helen, slowly stroking the pony's shoulder. "That will do very nicely. Yes, Miss Leslie, I shall attend to it."

Thank you so much!—it really is awfully kind; and will take great care of you! Good-bye,” and Miss Helen turned her pony and trotted off. Helen stood a moment or two with the rose-branch in her hand, and then thought. It would be a nice “ploy” to go up to Strakessachie on the party night and see the company; as to playing for the dancers, Helen felt herself quite capable of that. She rather liked, in her secret heart, playing dance-music, though she affected to despise it.

She met with no opposition from aunt or uncle. Mr. Brown chuckled, and peered into her face, and drawing his well-formed strong capable fingers through his own hair, said: “I would like fine to see ye set them all jiggin’! I’m not past enjoying a reel myself—though I don’t know what the folks would say gin they sa’ the minister Strakessachie trippin’ upo’ the ‘light fantastic toe’—eh, Helenie?—but maybe it’s no that out o’ the way for the foolish parsons! Eh, mamma, but there’ll be a geyner at Strakessachie when our Helenie sits down to the piano!”—and the minister rubbed his hands and ran off, whistling a strathspey.

Perhaps it may not be thought surprising that Helen should devote some consideration to the getting up of a dress for the party. Her Sunday silk was growing somewhat tarnished with the walks across country, and she was a little tired of it, to say the truth. But in the bottom of Helen’s “kist” there lay a certain white frock, made for some festive occasion gone by,

which she thought might be rendered passable. So she turned it out, and unpicked a good deal of it: then she rose at five one morning to wash and bleach it: finally having "got it up" with considerable care and skill she bought some wide black ribbon and coarse lace at the village merchant's and trimmed it up with a good deal of simple taste, according to the latest fashion-prints which she could acquire. She was by no means inclined, however, to have her appearance commented on by her uncle or even Aunt Elsie and the children; so on Monday night she resolutely locked poor Sophy out of their joint bed-room for nearly an hour, rigged herself out alone, and finally issued forth covered from head to foot by her black ulster, and with her everyday hat upon her smooth braids of black hair. Thus attired, and with her night-dress in her little handbag, Helen started off for her walk of "a mile and a bittock."

She arrived duly; was allowed to divest herself of her wrappings in a little temporary cloak-room, and reached the drawing-room which she found empty. Almost immediately, however, the ladies came in—a large and talkative party. Mrs. Leslie greeted her very good-naturedly, and found her a comfortable seat, rather out of the way, saying: "We are to begin the evening with a little vocal and instrumental music, and as I was sure you would enjoy that I told Kitty to be sure and ask you to come early."

The music did not begin until the gentlemen joined them: but then there was a clustering round the piano,

followed by some excellent singing. One young lady guest—unknown to Helen—was a brilliant vocalist, and occupied the piano-stool for some time. And Horace Penreath—who had not greeted or even perceived Helen yet—was very attentive to this lady, turning her music and guiding her selection, with his wonted good-natured frankness. But then most of the gentlemen were devoted to her—and she *had* a most glorious voice.

At last, when she had changed places with another performer, only instrumental, Mr. Penreath gravitated in the direction of Helen's corner, and shook hands with her. "I've only just found you out," he said; "and do you know, I hardly knew you in that white dress?" Something in his tone suggested admiration.

"No?" said Helen, feeling as much fluttered as was in her composed nature.

"And my cousins say you are going to be so kind as to be our ball-room musician presently! It's really awfully obliging of you—and in consideration of this I am going to be merciful, and not mention the name of Chopin."

"Oh no, Mr. Penreath—I could never perform before such a company."

"You *could*, no doubt—and a great deal better than Miss Greenhaugh of Byres—no, I mean Byres of Greenhaugh"—he corrected himself laughing—"I *do* confuse the people and the places so here!—but it would not be fair to ask you. *What's that, Blanche?*"

For Blanche Leslie came up rather imperiously to them. "Horace, you're wanted. Come and sing 'Farewell to Lochaber' directly." And Horace went away obediently: singing to Blanche's accompaniment the song for which he had been asked. It was the same little Scotch ballad as Helen had heard him sing on the former occasion; but it seemed, with its pathetic refrain, to touch her even more deeply than the first time: perhaps because she was in a more excited, highly-strung frame of mind. It jarred upon her nerves somewhat when, as he finished, that provoking Blanche swung round on her music-stool, saying, "'Farewell to Strathkessachie!' and grouse and roe-deer, and all such wicked vanities!"

Blanche had a curious way of saying things sometimes; an almost childish want of tact, it seemed. Helen liked her least of the three Leslies; though she was reckoned the beauty. She was tall and lithe and fair, and had eyes like a deer's—but she was not altogether pleasing in manner. Perhaps she struck Helen unfavourably from a certain coolness of manner towards herself, unlike the good-natured frankness of her elder sisters.

But now they were clearing the room for dancing; and Helen's work for the evening began. The piano was pushed into the most convenient corner; and, being set down to it, Helen went on with a will, playing reel, and schottische, and valse, and galop with most untiring and untripping fingers. There was a large



wall-mirror behind and above the piano; so whenever Helen raised her eyes she had a good view of the dancers. She noticed that Mr. Penreath danced often with the singing young lady, also with his cousin Blanche. Helen played with great good-will at first; but as dance after dance went on, and no one noticed her, beyond an occasional "thanks" or request for a particular tune, she began to feel a little discontented and envious of the dancing young ladies. After all, what were they that they should be amusing themselves all night, while she sat like an automaton to make their music?

At length, quite late, and when some of the guests had left, Horace and Miss Leslie came up to her.

"This is cruelty to animals, Miss Ledingham! I'm sure you must be tired of playing, and longing to dance to your own music. Will you take a few turns with me, if Kitty relieves you? I think she can manage a valse."

Helen could hardly conceal her delight, though she only said, "Oh, thank you, will it not be too much trouble?" to Miss Leslie. "I am not tired."

"No; please let me come—for I *am* tired—of dancing!" and so Kitty sat down and struck up a valse, and Horace led Helen out.

If the venture had been made as an act of kindness, Horace was amply rewarded. He had had many a first-rate dancer for his partner, in London ball-rooms and elsewhere, but never a better valser than this

Scotch lassie, who, tall and grandly-made as she looked, had the most perfect command of her stately person and supple limbs, and went round and round like a feather.

As for Helen herself, those few moments were bliss supreme. She too had had her experience of dancing; but her present companion moved with a quiet refined gentleness which perhaps she had failed to find among her partners of the country balls she had as yet only attended.

"That's famous," he said as they drew up at last; "and now you must come and have some refreshment. I hope they took care of you before—I didn't see."

"I had some tea, thank you—when I came."

"Nothing since tea!—good gracious, what must you think of us! Come, you must be starving. I never heard of such a thing!"

"I was not requiring anything, thanks," said Helen, but she was nothing loth to accompany him to the dining-room, where light refreshments were laid out. It was deserted now. Horace flew about collecting various eatables and drinkables, in great concern.

"Now," he said at length as he placed a plate of chicken-salad before her—"perhaps you'll be able to make out with that—and I've asked Harry to ring for some more claret-cup. It was too bad of no one to set you at liberty sooner; but you see with this sort of irregular business there was no break-up for supper, and nobody thought of it."

"You take too much trouble, Mr. Penreath," said Helen, who would have felt perfectly contented to sit there for any time with an empty plate, and him standing beside her.

"Don't hurry, pray. I hear Kitty going along famously. It'll do her good. We'll finish our valse afterwards. I didn't know you danced as well as you played."

"Ye'll find the most of Scotch girls can dance," said Helen, with a demure twinkle in her eye.

"So I believe. Well, I've had a jolly dance for my last night here. It'll be 'Farewell to Lochaber' for me and no mistake—after this. And my cousins tell me I shall have to give up all this sort of thing. Do you think, Miss Ledingham, that there's any harm in a parson taking a dance, now and then?"

"Indeed, I never considered the subject."

"What would Mr. Argo say?"

"I wouldn't very much care what Mr. Argo said. No, thanks, Mr. Penreath—I'm for nothing more," as he held her some other dish.

"Come along then." As they returned to the drawing-room, Blanche came up rather abruptly. "Oh there you are, Horace. We want to wind up with 'Sir Roger de Coverley.' And they're making up now."

"All right then. Kitty can play that."

"Kitty's to dance with Mr. Bytes. If you're *rested*, Miss Ledingham" (with rather a peculiar emphasis on

her words), "we shall be much obliged if you'll begin at once."

Helen immediately recollected herself. She withdrew her arm from Horace, who made a comical face of resignation, muttering "What a shame!" and sat down at her post. But what feelings were in the girl's mind as her hands swept the keys, those who danced to her playing little guessed.

There was Blanche, who had appropriated Horace for her own partner, as it seemed, flying round the figures, with an eagerness in her large dark eyes that betokened a little ruffled temper. And in the pauses she spoke to him now and then—in a short, imperious, almost snappish, tone. Helen's eyes seemed riveted to her in the mirror; and the longer she looked and played, the greater dislike she felt towards Miss Blanche. The dance seemed interminable; but at length it came to an end, and with it Helen's work for the evening. She wished Miss Leslie good-night—Mrs. Leslie was surrounded by visitors—was thanked for her contribution to the evening's amusements, and made her way out, in her ulster and old hat, with her little bag. The house-door was open: some of the young men who had been seeing some guests off, were coming in; and Horace was standing on the step lighting a cigar. He caught sight of the tall, dark figure. "Hallo, Miss Ledingham!—running away home like Cinderella? It's a very dark night for you."

"I'm only going to the lodge, you know."

"Oh, ah, yes, so they said. You must let me escort you so far." And as he joined her and offered her his arm he added, "There might be wild bulls in the avenue."

"It is too bad of you always to bring that against me, Mr. Penreath."

"Is it? Well, but really, it's too dark for one to go so far alone, almost. You might get off the path."

It really was very dark, under the fir-trees which skirted the long avenue; but Helen did not mind that. If she were running home like Cinderella, she had the prince beside her.

"I'm sure we're all greatly indebted to you to-night, Miss Ledingham! I only trust you are not very tired."

"Oh no, thank you: I have enjoyed myself so well!"

"Have you? Oh, ah, the singing you would like, I know; Miss Carnegie's voice is very good, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Helen. She had not been thinking of Miss Carnegie.

"Do you think you will stay long with Mr. Argo?" Horace asked next. "I mean to say—a—do you think you will be here next year?"

"I really couldn't say, Mr. Penreath. It depends on circumstances."

"Yes? Well, if I ever come here again—if we ever meet, you'll find a wonderfully transmogrified individual, I expect—no fun in him at all!"

"No? Why should that be?"

"There'll be no fun for him, at any rate—if you

believe my cousins. But I always thought there would be no use coming to Scotland at all, if one is not to be after the grouse."

"And I suppose," said Helen timidly, "you will not care to carry that on? I believe some do."

"Yes. Is there any harm? When Kitty wants to aggravate me she says there's nothing so bad as a sporting parson—and I must never look at a gun again—I never can see why what is innocent for a layman is mortal sin for a parson."

Helen thought for a moment. She had heard of such a text as "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient"—but she would not have ventured for a moment to quote it to her companion. "I suppose," she said at length, "a minister's work is so engrossing—so important, that he would have little thought to spare for those things, by what another person may have."

"Yes. But surely one would have a *holiday* now and then?" said poor Horace pathetically. "And then, would taking a pot at the grouse or the roe be a bit worse than lawn-tennis, for instance? Do *you* think it would?"

"Indeed, Mr. Penreath, I could not take upon me to pronounce."

"Well, right or wrong, I'm not likely to have much chance of doing it for a long time to come. It's not the prospect to make one feel particularly jolly—especially after the glorious time I've had of it here!"

"But then, Mr. Penreath, why should—" Helen was beginning, and stopped short with a sudden feeling of her own presumption, in what she was going to say.

"I beg your pardon?"

"No—I was not to finish."

"Please do. Yes; you were going to ask why I was going in for this—weren't you?—when I am so unfitted?"

"Oh no; only if you did not like it why you should choose the profession?"

"Ah yes, why? Yet when I come to think of it, I don't think I had much choice in the matter. I mean," he continued, as Helen said nothing, "it was always a sort of understood thing that I was to be my father's successor. It's an old family living, in my uncle's gift; and there's been a Penreath there for three generations. My governor would be awfully disappointed if I didn't qualify—and I'm the only son, you see. But I daresay I shall get on as comfortably at that as at anything. I don't think I've any particular turn for anything else; and I shall get reconciled, in time. Now here is the lodge—ah, I see old Esslemont has a light in his window. Good-night—and good-bye; I'm sorry it's good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Penreath."

"Good-bye—you wish me luck, don't you? I've a lot of hard work to get through; I am sure I have your good wishes."

"Yes, indeed you have, Mr. Penreath; thank you for your kindness to me."

He shook her hand warmly, then turned away with a courteous bow. Helen had a great deal of reserve and self-command, but when old Esslemont threw open his door and showed the light, it danced in her eyes upon great spangles of tears. They came thick and fast when, a few minutes afterwards, she laid her head on the pillow of the cosy, though humble bed in the old griever's one little guest-chamber. She was tired and overstrung with her night's work, or she would not have been so unaccountably silly. But as she closed her eyes, vainly courting sleep for a while, there would haunt her, for all the polkas and schottisches that had been ringing in her ears all night, the pathetic refrain of the old ballad—

"For Lochaber no more, Lochaber no more,
We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more."

The ladies at Strathkessachie were having a few last words in the drawing-room when Horace went in to say good-night.

"Well, Horace, have you finished your cigar?" said Maude.

"Yes. It's a delightful night, but pitch-black. I went as far as the lodge with Miss Ledingham."

"What!—flirting with the 'extensively-educated'! Take care, Horace," said Kitty.

"What do you mean?" he answered in half-assumed

nation. "Do you think I was going to let the creature grope her way to the lodge on a night this, after slaving all these hours to amuse us?"

Slaving! she was pretty well amused herself."

Do you think so? Well, she's thankful for small ones, any way."

I think she ought to be—and she'll have her head. One might have sent James and a lantern for her, though."

One might, but one did not. Whereby I was gainer by a refreshing stroll, and some improving conversation."

No!" laughed Kitty. "What did you talk about?" Wouldn't you like to know?"

Oh, do you know," said Maude, "when you were young, Kitty, old Mrs. Byres asked me who that very handsome girl in white was that was dancing with Mr. Heath. She did not the least make out that she was our musician."

Well," said Horace, "she is a very handsome girl—we can deny that."

And she's quite aware of the fact," said Kitty.

Well, and why not? She's a stunning valser, any way! After dragging round that Miss Thingummy of hers, I can tell you it was a treat."

There you go again, Horace! I believe you called that to her face."

Then it shows people ought to call themselves by their simple and right names—any how she's an

elephant, and I won't ask her to valse again. I never felt a girl go round like Miss Ledingham, positively."

"Well, it's fortunate this is the winding-up, anyhow!" said Kitty, "as I feel myself answerable for asking her up here."

"Perhaps it is," said Horace. "At any rate next time you ask a young lady to come up and make herself useful, I advise you to see that she gets something to eat, for her trouble. It was by the mere chance that she had anything but one wretched cup of tea, all these blessed hours!"

"Well yes, I was sorry for that," said Kitty more penitently; "but I was so taken up, and the whole supper business was such a scramble, you see—I was much obliged to you for seeing to it—and at any rate she was well taken care of at last."

"As well as *I* could, under the circumstances. And poor creature! instead of being cross and huffy, after I had got together a few scraps and leavings, just to keep her from starvation, she said it was 'taking too much trouble.'"

"Like the poor people here. They always say that when you give them anything."

A look of displeasure, such as Kitty did not often get from her good-natured cousin, crossed the young man's open face for a moment, and there was something of displeasure too in the assumed lightness of his tone as he said, taking out his watch:

"Well, the hour is somewhat advanced, and as I've

journey before me, I shall retire. Good-night, Aunt Kate," to Mrs. Leslie, who had been moving about the rooms during this conversation and now came up; "good-night, Kitty; good-night, Maude; where is Blanche? I have not seen her."

"Blanche is gone to *bed*," said Kitty, with emphasis.

"Oh—wheugh!" Horace emitted a low whistle, as he went to light his candle.

CHAPTER XVI.

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP.

ANOTHER Christmas was coming round, and as it approached, Jeanie Ledingham was looking forward with some impatience to her long-promised holiday at home.

November had brought several little events to the small circle at Abermurchie. First of all came the election of Mr. Leslie Esslemont to the provostship of the town. This, as we have seen, had been considered likely for some time; and besides the fact that the grain merchant was a generally esteemed and popular character, his friends rejoiced in his acceptance of a position which would perforce oblige him to come more into society than he had done since the death of his young wife. His exaltation was a source of greater excitement to his family than to himself. Katie appeared to think that Dada was only second in importance to the Prime Minister; and even Jeanie felt a little reflected glory in belonging in some way to so distinguished a person.

Then came Miss Spence's bazaar, at which Jeanie, and to her great joy, Katie, took an active part as donors at that lady's table. Here of course the provost played an important part, being obliged to support the local magnate who "opened" the proceedings. Shortly after the bazaar, the annual tradesmen's *conversazione* and ball came off. Leslie had not attended ball for years; but this year it seemed a part of his duty to countenance the affair, and besides there was Jeanie to take; and Katie was so much less of an invalid now that her father felt in better spirits for any little gaiety. So he went, with Jeanie under his wing. And being at the ball, it did not require much effort to set him dancing; moreover, as a special act of self-abnegation, or of respect towards good old Dr. Spence, or both, he actually ventured on a square dance with Miss Spence, and further took her to supper.

It may be more easily imagined than described how Miss Spence was in the very highest state of triumph: how every curl on her head (and they were many) vibrated with delight: how archly she patted Leslie with her fan, and called him "my dear provost" for every one to hear; and how, when after a lengthened parade arm-in-arm he bowed her into a seat, he inwardly vowed nothing should induce him so to sacrifice himself again. Miss Spence's one topic of conversation afterwards was the dear provost, to all her sympathizing female friends at any rate; and in the pauses of a merry "Petronella" Jeanie standing near

heard the vivacious lady saying to her sister Mrs. Bruce, "Yes; *isn't* he looking well, and in such spirits? Papa was quite right; he always said he only wanted to come out more and mix in society—getting quite unsociable, he was, you know, dear, and such a pity—such a fine man too!"

Jeanie meanwhile was enjoying herself thoroughly in her own way. Of course John Robbie was of the party. Since his more than suspicion that Leslie knew and looked kindly on his attachment, though nothing more had been said, Jock had become less reticent, less careful to hide the secret of his love for Jeanie. To-night he made no secret of it at all, dancing with her almost every dance, and devoting the greater part of the intermediate time to her. Jeanie was very happy; at the same time that she was growing ever more anxious to go home and have her talk with her mother. She was even afraid lest some flying rumour might reach her, before her own arrival; which of all things Jeanie would have disliked.

A slight fall of snow had come early in December, then a "fresh," and then a remarkably severe frost. The weather only quickened Jeanie's anxiety, lest she should be storm-staid at Abermurchie. On the fifteenth of December she was to go: Leslie having to attend a market in the county town, escorting her so far on her way.

She was very happy over her preparations; and took a cheerful leave of Katie, who was only consoled by the

mise of her speedy return, and considered herself y magnanimous in agreeing to "want" her beloved nie for so *long*. The day was a bright one, though ensely cold; and it was in great spirits that Jeanie off with her cousin to walk to the train.

But "there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip," and in s instance the proverb was to be proved only too rally! The road and footpath were in that happy dition induced by hard frost succeeding to a partial w of snow; and as they turned the corner of the gh Street and took the slight incline leading to station Leslie said to his companion: "It's regular sting upon the brae—take care and not lose your t, Jeanie."

The words were scarcely spoken when one of his own t slipped slightly, and he came down with an alarm-ly sudden crash upon his left side. Jeanie almost her own balance in avoiding him, but recovering self the next moment she held out her hand to him he made one or two ineffectual struggles to rise. 's of no use, my dear—I've broken something, I'm e," and spite of the intense cold of the air, the spiration stood on his brow with pain as he lay back. 'e'll just need to wait—till some one comes."

Some one" was not long in coming. Anything an accident, in town or village, always collects a vd; and though there were not many people abroad ng to the state of the roads, there were always men ut the station. Mr. Esslemont—or rather Provost

—too, was known to them all; and various were the offers of help and expressions of concern.

Then, with much scuffling and digging of “frosted” hoofs, up came the railway bus: stopping with no small difficulty on the brae, for the horses could hardly get foothold. There was a proposal to make use of the vehicle; but poor Leslie “sang out” so lustily at any attempt to raise him that it was evident there was some fracture, needing more cautious conveyance. Several men went to look for a shutter, and during the few minutes’ delay thus caused, as a whistle sounded from the station, Leslie said to Jeanie, “My dear, that’s the train. Ye’ve lost her, I believe.”

“Never mind the train—I must see you home,” said Jeanie, earnestly. “I’m so sorry you’re so badly hurt.”

“It’s an awkward business—but, Jeanie, my dear, would ye run home and tell my mother—and see that ye put Katie out of the road—the child ’ll have a fit if she sees me carried in like a log.”

“Eh yes, I’ll go at once if you can want me, Leslie. Ye’ll not grow sick?” she added doubtfully, looking down on the face that had turned from red to pale now, with occasional twitches of the lips.

“No; not if they lift me canny—I’m sure my leg’s broke. But hist ye, there’s a dear lass, and mind yer own feet, for any sake!”

So Jeanie hurried off, and hardly felt the dangers of the path in her anxiety to reach home in good time; where she found Mrs. Ledingham beginning to prepare

ress Katie, for it was yet early. Jeanie called her out the room and in a few words told what had happened. Aunt Annie was a woman of expedients. She did not waste a moment in idle lamentation. "I tell ye that, lassie, we'll just hurl Katie's bed into the little room, and ye'll stop with her ben there. I'll put in my ain bed, for if he has to lie a while, as likely may, it'll be a heap convenienter. Baubie!"—to the young girl,—"*hist ye and rin ower to Doctor Spence, he'll bid him come 'soon's he's able.*"

The operation of "hurling" Katie's bed into the little room hitherto occupied by her father was soon performed. Poor Katie of course was open-eyed with astonishment and anxiety as to what had happened to her; but Jeanie did her best to alleviate her fears, and to distract her mind by going on with her dressing usual.

It seemed a long time to Jeanie that she was shut out of that little room. She heard the steps that betokened poor Leslie's arrival, and the various voices, at length Dr. Spence's, which was a welcome sound. Dr. Spence evidently had a good deal to do when he came, though he was doing it quietly and promptly. And his patient, whatever he might be suffering from, was careful to repress all outward expression of pain, lest any unwary groan or exclamation might be communicated to Katie. "See that Katie's no in the way," had been poor Leslie's one repeated direction to his nurse when they reached the house.

At last to the relief of Jeanie and Katie in their imprisonment, there was a tap at the inner room door, and Dr. Spence's weather-beaten face, several degrees redder with the frost, looked in. "Well, little missie," he said to Katie, "your Dada's all right at last, and he bids me tell ye he's pairfitly well, and ready to see ye—and ye're nae to be frightened though he suld be lyin'! He'll just need to lie where he is a while, and keep you company—and ye must nottice him and keep him amused, for I doubt he'll think long—but he's quite safe."

"Is it a bad injury?" Jeanie asked.

"Comminuted fracture of the thigh—that's all," said Dr. Spence, with a little twinkle in his eye as if it were the pleasantest possible announcement. "He would fall some heavy. Tedious—but no airthly danger."

"How long will he be lyin'?"

"Well, he must stop where he is a month or six weeks. Ay, I doubt he'll weary," and the doctor chuckled again; "but that's nothing. Awful ro'ds," he continued; "and tak' care o' yer ain fit, Miss Jeanie, if ye're goin' through the toon. I've never had so many fractures amo' my hands as I have this last five days!"

Katie, meanwhile, had adjusted her crutches, and flown to her father's bedside.

"Well, my lammie, I'm all safe, ye see, but did ever ye know the like of such a stupid old Dada?"

"Poor old Dada!" said Katie compassionately. "I your leg broken?"

"So Spence tells me."

"Which one is it?"

"The left. Don't you come near hand, that's a pettie."

"Is it awful sore?"

"No; just a nasty twinge now and again."

"And will ye have to go upo' crutches like *me*?" said Katie, putting her head on one side like a little bird.

"I hope not, dear. But I'll have to stop at home with you a bittie."

"Eh, and I'll nottice ye and wait upo' ye: that *will* be nice!" said Katie, clapping her hands. "I'll take *such* care of ye, and when Grannie and Jeanie's out me and you'll just hold a time *ourselves*!—won't we?"

"Ye little puss! I believe ye're glad ye've me tied by the leg," said Leslie, laughing. "But where's Jeanie? Would ye ask her to speak to me a minutie! Where's ye, Jeanie, my dear?"

Thus summoned, Jeanie came forward somewhat timidly, glancing half-shyly at the big man in Aunt Annie's bed, lying almost flat on his back.

"Come away, lassie—I'm no so ill's all that; ye edn't be frightened."

"I hope ye're feeling yourself better now, cousin," said Jeanie.

"Ay; I'm pretty easy now—I was just in torture when ye left me upo' the brae. Well, my dear, what about your going home? for I've spoilt your journey for to-day, I doubt."

Yes; Jeanie too had been thinking what about her going home. She had a practical mind, and had soon taken in the situation. She did want to go home very much. She did want to talk to her mother, on the important matter that was filling her heart. But then, here was her cousin Leslie—in robust health, but to all intents and purposes as helpless as a baby—*more* helpless than Katie—for at least a month; perhaps longer. His mother of course was his natural and proper attendant; but was the poor old lady to be left with him, and Katie in her half-helpless state, both on her hands, with only Baubie's uncouth assistance, or the alternative of calling in strange help? No; Jeanie felt at once that placed as she was it would be gross selfishness on her part to insist on her visit home at present; and she answered at once promptly and quickly: "I'll not seek home just now—not till you're some better."

"Would ye be willin' to defer it?" he asked rather anxiously. "I would be so sorry to ask ye—and yet, I fear this will come some heavy upon my mother. But she'll maybe make out to get some assistance."

"Certainly not, Cousin Leslie. I wouldn't think of such a thing. I'll stop with Katie—and do anything I can to assist Aunt Annie, if *you* please."

"Well, you're an obliging lass, Jeanie, and of course it'll make a right odds to my mother and Katie, if you stay. Ye'll need to make up for it by-and-by. And now, my dear, wouldn't it be well if ye were wirin' to your mother? She'll grow anxious at night maybe; and

ye can write her by the post. Stay; is that some person at the door?"

"Yes—why I believe it's Miss Spence," said Jeanie, looking round.

"Eh! dinna let her in here, for any sake!" cried poor Leslie, in an almost comic state of helpless terror. "My mother's in the kitchen and will never hear her—hist ye, Jeanie, and keep the door; say I'm too ill to see any one!"

Jeanie went, only just in time, for Miss Spence's short thickset person had obtruded itself into the inner passage. She was all in a quiver of impulsive anxiety.

"Oh! *you* here still!" were her first words. "I thought—I came—if I could be of any use to Mrs. Peter—and the dear provost—I was so grieved, so grieved!" and all the curls shook again.

"Thank you; yes, it's very unfortunate," said Jeanie.

"Would I come in—just a minute?" said Miss Spence, trying to edge past her.

"My cousin does not feel able for seeing visitors eynow."

"Ah no, of course not; but an old friend like myself might cheer him up a little."

"That was what he bid me say whatever," said Jeanie stoutly; "and he's a good deal pained whiles."

"Ah! yes, I know—the spasm of the muscles—so distressing; but Grannie should tie a brick to his foot, you know—a weight;—didn't papa order it? A brick

—or a seven-pound weight. Might I see Grannie for minute?"

Grannie just then emerged from the kitchen. Jeanie knew *she* would guard the door as stoutly as any one, so she retreated into the background, leaving Miss Spence to reiterate the many recommendations with which she would fain supplement her father's skill. I am afraid that Jeanie and the patient had a quiet laugh to themselves over Miss Spence when the closing of the house-door betokened her safe departure, doubtless much disappointed at having been unable to tie a brick to the dear provost's foot.

That danger over, Jeanie said she would go at once about the telegram. "And is there anything I can do for ye when I'm out, Leslie?"

"Deed is there, my dear, if you are so good. It's not a hundred yards from the post, when ye *are* out—maybe you wouldn't mind calling at my office to let Jock know how matters stand. He's not expecting to see me to-day, so he'll not miss me. And I would be glad to him as soon's he can come over."

Jeanie dressed and started on her errand. She despatched her mother's telegram, then went to the merchant's office, at the door of which she knocked, wondering what Jock would think of her apparition.

"Come in!" said a rather languid voice, and Jeanie saw her lover busily writing in his big chair, with his shoulders almost up to his ears; but

ed and saw her he started up in double quick time.
anie! by a' that's wonderful!"

eanie's fresh cheeks—ruddy with the intense cold
he outer air—received two warm salutes before she
d take in the comforting assurance "We're all
ourselves here, ye know. I wasn't looking to see
one the day. And what's the fortunate chance
gs ye here? I thought ye were away."

Not a fortunate chance, John. My cousin's slipped
the ice and broken his leg, just now."

Poor old Leslie! He *must* have come down with
ash," said the irreverent Jock. "I say!—and he'll
loored than?"

I thought ye would be sorry for him," said Jeanie,
btly jarred by his tone.

Sorry! of course I am—and for myself too. I'll
e to do his work and my own as well, I doubt."

I don't know about that. But he would like to
k wi' you, as soon's ye can come over, and that's
he's sent me."

He couldn't have sent a better. And if you'll
our us so far as to take a chair, while I shut up
, I'll walk back with you, my dear. Ay, look
it ye, that's right—what d'ye think of our place—a
sed hole, is't no, for a fellow to pass his days in?"
eanie thought there might be many worse places,
she said so. It was a light clean tidy little office;
a large fire burnt and sparkled in the grate, making
contrast of temperature with the open air very

considerable. But in spite of this poor Jock's looked rather pinched, and his fingers white and num—as young clerks' fingers will, in frosty weather.

"Ye like it, do ye?" he said in the same tone. "Faith, I never saw any one set it so well before Miss Jean Ledingham;" and he broke off to hum:

"The desert were a paradise,
If thou wert there—if thou wert there!"

"There now!" as he put the last folio in its place. "I think that's about square, and Mester Esslen is doon my thro't I can tell ye, if a' thing's not exactly where he wishes; but he'll no be here for whilie, if you say true. Well, poor old chappie, sorry for him—and so ye'll be done out of your holly poor lassie! Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good—come away!" And indulging in one more before he opened the door, Jock drew his sweetheart's arm within his own, and they walked back together, thinking nothing of the ice-coated path.

Jock dropped his tone of levity, which had rained Jeanie, when they reached the house; she admitted to herself with pride that no one could be more kind, sympathizing, and respectful than was to his brother-in-law. They had a long business talk, ending by Jock's remaining to the mid-day meal before he went back to the office. "Ye may depend on me doin' my very utmost to keep things in order," he said. "And if there be anything I can do to as-

ye, night or day, ye've just only to command me," were his parting words to Leslie.

They all felt strange under the altered circumstances when night came, and poor Leslie conducted the accustomed family worship from his bed. And Jeanie, instead of (as she had fondly hoped and anticipated) sharing that night her little old room at the farm with her sister Lizzie, found herself relegated to the inner apartment into which Katie's bed had been "hurled," with the sole charge and responsibility of Katie for the time being; while Aunt Annie extemporized a bed for herself upon Katie's little sofa, to watch over her own big baby in his sudden helplessness.

CHAPTER XVII.

STORM-STAID.

POOR Leslie bore his trial for a few days very placidly and patiently ; and then, it must be confessed, he began to fret and fidget a little.

It was only natural. He was heart and soul a business man ; and he fretted and pined to be about his business, disliking the delegation of any part of his duty to another. His health was affected, too, by the confinement and inactivity : he felt the intense and prolonged cold of the season ; and he found that reading his letters and papers, and answering them in his recumbent position gave him a terrible "sore head" —Anglicè, headache. Which being a malady hitherto unknown to him, made him dispirited, and as his mother, without mincing matters, put it, "ill-natur'd."

Little Katie was in her glory, and I am seriously afraid forgot the inconvenience to "*poor* old Dada" in her delight at having him always at home to caress and wait on.

It was pretty to see how she would hang over him,

ut on her crutches, to bring him his pipe, or
his cup of tea even—she was growing so
; and her voice and touch could always drive
l from his brow when it *was* there; for poor
ill-natur' ” was, after all, only comparative.

took up her share of the household burden
and willingly. Her chief aim was to save
nie all extraneous work and leave her free and
“notice” her invalid; so, with Baubie only,
ashed and scrubbed and cooked and baked,
rly and retiring late; went messages out of
sides taking charge of Katie by night and by
both Leslie and his mother said they did not
at they should have done without her.

rtainly had felt a good deal of disappointment
her visit home, the more so as her sister Helen
e at home for Christmas; but she bore the
tment cheerfully, and never showed it to her
ns. She had some consolation too in poor
atisfaction; also in his constant presence, and
to her cousin.

ad been most assiduous, both in and out of the
nd seemed only anxious to please and assist his
a-law. But alas! one luckless day he went to
mas market, *vice* Leslie; and when business
“met in ” with some friends who treated him,
y but too well. Consequently, his colleague,
he traveller, waited upon Mr. Esslemont at
report Mr. Robbie as having been obliged to

go home, very unwell. When next day he came in, looking decidedly seedy, but very deprecatory and smiling at first, Leslie received him shortly enough; and having desired that they should be left alone together, gave the luckless youth a thorough rating. In the course of which he asked him how he could ever expect to win a good, well-doing, high-minded girl like Miss Jean Ledingham for his wife—or any other—if he went on in such a disgraceful way?

It was the nearest approach to the subject which Leslie had ever allowed himself to make; but he was thoroughly angry now, and spoke his thoughts plainly. Jock answered sulkily, that “gin a girl couldn’t make allowance for a fellow whose health wasn’t strong, and so on, he was better to want her.” And the confidence went no further. Poor Jeanie’s sad face and heavy eyes were enough to tell any one *her* tale; and alone with her Jock did express some penitence mingled with all sorts of excuses and palliations: so the affair blew over for the time.

One day, just after the new year, Jeanie came into the room looking rather radiant. “That’s a letter from my oldest sister, and she says she’s going back to Kessachie upon Tuesday. She would like so much to see me as she passes up, for a few hours, but she couldn’t get stopped any time and go on the same night, and she’s askin’ if I could take her into my room for a night. She doesn’t know of course what way we are just now, but if you could allow her to come, Aunt

Annie, she could easily have my room still, when it's empty."

"'Deed, my dear, we'd be delighted to see her," Leslie said at once before his mother could speak. "I only wish I were not lyin' here always, a useless log; but an' she can put up with that, we'll do our best to make her welcome. Will we no, mother?"

"To be sure," said Aunt Annie. "I'll be real glad to see Nellie. She was a bonnie lassie when I saw her last; I'se warran' she'll be grown a pretty girl, an' she be like her mother."

So Jeanie went to write her letter; and greatly she looked forward to the coming of Helen. She wondered whether she should be able to pluck up courage to make a confidante of her. She was rather in awe, it must be confessed, of this tall handsome clever elder sister; but still the comfort of seeing any home face would be great. And Helen doubtless would have much to tell her.

The Sunday before, Jeanie happened to be at church alone; and Jock Robbie walking home with her afterwards, she imparted to him that her oldest sister was coming to see her "upon Tuesday first."

"She is?" said Jock. "And pray, is she any like yer sweet self?"

"Eh no. Nellie's no like me. I wish I were liker her," said Jeanie innocently.

"Faith, you're not needin' to wish yourself like her—or anybody else!" said Jock, taking a critical look at

her up and down. "That's a terrible becoming hat you've got, Jeanie, my dear."

"I'm glad ye approve of it," said Jeanie, smiling. John Robbie was inclined to be rather particular about ladies' dress, and often favoured Jeanie when they were alone with his views on the subject.

Jeanie was very happy when she set off to meet Helen at the train. The streets were in safer condition now, owing to a fresh fall of snow; that day was fine, but there was an appearance in the air as of more snow to come.

Helen's train was slightly delayed by the snow. But it came in at last; and there was Helen, all safe and sound, and very glad to meet Jeanie once again.

They were certainly a great contrast, those two sisters, as they walked up the street, and Jeanie thought Helen looked more like a real lady than ever. She wore her dark ulster still, but it fitted her tall fine figure to perfection; and a natty black fur tippet over her shoulders gave a finish to her appearance, crowned by the very becoming black beaver hat with one turned-up side. Poor little Jeanie's clothes, good of their kind though they might be, never sat upon her with the style which Helen's took as soon as she put them on.

Jeanie felt not a little proud of her handsome sister; especially when in the street they chanced to meet John Robbie; though whether it were chance or intention that caused him to cross their path then, may be matter of speculation. Jeanie introduced them, wondering

uch how her lover would impress Helen. They had not many words then, as Jock was going in another direction; and Helen made no remark.

Aunt Annie received them at the door with her usual cordiality to her own kin, and led Helen at once to their living-room where Leslie was still a close prisoner, though able now to be partly dressed.

"I'm sorry I'm not able to rise and give ye a welcome, cousin Helen," he said, as he held out his hand to her. But here I am, ye see, a terrible bother to myself and every one else—except this wee puss here"—turning to Katie, who was standing by his head; "and she, I believe, thinks I'm as good as a very big doll. See, my pettie, here's a bonnie new cousinnie to ye! Haven't I said a word to her?" Helen was almost as much struck with Katie as Jeanie had been, and embraced her cordially.

"Are you Jeanie's sister Nellie that she speaks about?" Katie said. "Ye're not a bit like *my* Jeanie."

"Amn't I?—but I hope we'll be friends none the less," said Helen, laughing.

And then there were many enquiries after Helen's mother, and the rest; but at last Jeanie was at liberty to carry her sister off upstairs to her own disused attic, which Helen was to inhabit.

There was much to be asked about home and homelife, and all such questions Helen answered freely and readily; but as to her own life and associates she was more reticent. She had always been reserved; but

now Jeanie perceived a difference in her, felt that a *something* she knew not what had come over Helen: a something that, while it made Helen herself unapproachable, made Jeanie doubly shy and unwilling to begin about her own affairs.

"And how are you, Jeanie?" she asked at length.
"You look blooming."

"Yes; I'm real well."

"It's really a pity you couldn't get home and see mother. Very stupid of Mr. Esslemont to go and break his leg, I must say. And so he treats you well, does he?"

"Treats me well! he's all kindness. He couldn't be kinder if I were his own child."

"How stout he's getting," was Helen's next remark.
"I would hardly have known him. That little Katie is pretty. Is she not too petted?"

"Oh no, Nellie! Ye *couldn't* spoil Katie."

"Is the old lady good-tempered?"

"Yes, always—to me."

"And have ye any society, like?—any friends?"

"Just a few. I think," said Jeanie, rather feeling her way, "the Robbies are my chief friends. Perhaps if it's a good day to-morrow ye would come over and see Agnes, before ye leave?"

"Who's Agnes?"

"I remembered I'd told ye. Leslie's wife's sister, just. But she's crippled, and doesn't go much about. I often go and see her."

'I see. She's the sister of that boy that we met, n?"

'Just that." Jeanie felt a conscious flush mount to cheeks, but the daylight was already dim, and en perhaps did not observe it. "That boy!"—so ; was how he had struck Helen. Jeanie felt a little nded: less than ever disposed to proceed to a idence.

hey sat for a long time in the attic chatting as ers love to do after a long separation: but there e depths untouched in the hearts of each. If Helen not been to a great extent preoccupied, she might e noticed, I think, a certain change in Jeanie. ve and sober, though bright enough, little Jeanie always been; but there was an increased serious- s about her now in grave moments, and also a ne happiness which sparkled out in lighter ones, pervaded her whole demeanour. Helen's face, en in repose, did not show the same inward peace. e slight expression of discontent, long observable, e certainly increased: there was a wistfulness in the ge beautiful eyes, an almost unrest in the lines of handsome mouth; she looked older, too, Jeanie ught. It might have been the hard, often unsatis- ag, wearying nature of her daily work, amid unsym- hetic companions; but it was not this alone. Helen's ure was troubled: her heart was not in her own eeping. She had let it go, foolishly, perhaps, but llessly. A chance meeting, a kindly face, a few

half-patronizing good-natured words, a certain technical sympathy with a person quite removed from her own sphere of life—were these enough, really enough, to destroy for ever the peace of this stately, calm, active-minded, busy-fingered farmer's daughter? Let those who have passed through her experience answer the question.

When at last the two sisters descended from their attic, they found tea spread in the cosy living-room; and John Robbie was sitting beside Leslie, talking over the business of the day; as was almost his daily custom. Jeanie felt pleased to see him, pleased that Helen would thus have an opportunity of seeing him to better advantage. But for whatever reason, Jock was not like himself that night. Perhaps he had the feeling that he was being inspected by one of Jeanie's nearest relations; but whatever might be the reason, he was unusually quiet, silent, and even sheepish in his manner: and there was no word of music after tea.

"Yon's a handsome girl, grown, of Margaret's," Leslie said when he was at length alone with his mother at night. "And real like Margaret herself when she was young."

"Ay," said Mrs. Ledingham, "she's handsome; but she hasna just the couthie look o' Margaret—when I first mind upo' her." And then coming nearer to him she added: "Did ye notice Jock the night?"

"I saw that he was much quieter than his usual—he'd been bashful, maybe."



"Good! Leslie, he never took his eyes frae her
e."

"What, Helen's? I'll wager she's no better than his
n choice, though she may be a showier lass to look to."

"That I'll be bound she is na—better," said Grannie.
nd if she isna so bonnie a'together, I think there's
omething in her face that is not in Helen's."

"I doubt ye're about right there, mother," said Leslie.
d then he sighed rather wearily. He was getting so
d, poor fellow, of the long days and nights in the
e place; although Dr. Spence assured him that he
going on as well as he could expect.

Helen was to start by the midday train next morning,
as to get to Kessachie "in daylight." But when the
rning came the inhabitants of Abermurchie looked
h upon a fresh snow-storm descending pitilessly,
h a good allowance of wind to drift it. Both Leslie
his mother opined that Helen could hardly risk the
rney; but they were put out of all doubt by Jock
ing in soon after nine o'clock open-mouthed. "Line
oked to north and south—telegraph destroyed—and
ee trains sticket behind other between this and the
ond station from town! Ye'll not win away the day,
as Ledingham."

"Dear, how very unfortunate!" said Helen, in very
feigned dissatisfaction. "It's just a terrible bother.
o wish now I had never stopp'd."

"No bother to us, my dear," said Leslie readily,
hough I well know it's disagree'ble not to be able to

keep one's appointments. But there's one thing—your friends will never expect you in such weather."

"I don't suppose I would get the length of Mont-hoolie the day," said Helen.

"Not likely," put in Jock. "There's awful drifts in some of the cuttin's, they say—fifteen and sixteen feet of snow."

"And if you did," Leslie went on, "ye don't know if ye'd win up to yon place from the station. The country roads is likely in a bad state. So I think ye must just make yer mind easy about stoppin' till the weather clear some."

"You are very kind, cousin. I'm only afraid I'm putting you and my aunt to inconvenience.

"Not a bit, not a bit. We're real glad to keep ye. And there's poor Jeanie that hasn't seen a home face this long while—I doubt it's a lucky storm for her."

So Helen found herself obliged to submit to the inevitable. She did not on the whole dislike staying. Her aunt and Leslie were too kind and hospitable for her to feel in the way. And Jeanie was delighted at the extension of the visit: also little Katie, who had discovered that Helen knew some pretty new stitches in fancy-work, and was quite ready to impart them to her.

Jock Robbie invited himself to tea that night, and the next, and the next. For the storm continued to rage for three days: blowing up roads and cuttings as soon as they were opened. The line was kept open,

er a fashion, from the county town to Abermurchie ;
t a little beyond, on the north side, were some hope-
s drifts, and for a few days that part remained
passable for trains.

On the fourth day there was a lull in the storm, and
sun shone forth again. Helen and Jeanie were
wing tired of their captivity, though not of each
er's society. and were meditating an experimental
k, when Jock Robbie presented himself at an earlier
ur than usual, with a very urgent and pressing
uest from his mother and sister that "*both* the Miss
linghams" would come across that afternoon and
p a few hours. "The streets is fine, and the ploughs
re new gone round, so as it's all clear where ye'd
re to go. And I'll come for ye myself and convoy ye
:k. My mother's to make sowens—and she'll be real
app'inted if you will not come."

Jeanie looked at Helen for consent. Helen was
ery much obliged to Mrs. Robbie—if it was a fair
ght, and her sister wished it, she would go."

Jock appeared to take Jeanie's wish as a matter of
arse, for he scarcely looked at her, though Jeanie's
re expressed her pleasure ; but ran away at once, pro-
sing he would be back to fetch them "at the back of
ur"—there was nothing hindering him to-night.

He came punctually ; and the girls in their wraps set
f. There were not many pedestrians abroad ; but at
rs. Robbie's they found a few more young people as-
sembled, chiefly female friends of Agnes and her mother.

They spent a very merry evening—drinking “sowens” (a perfectly harmless composition made from oatmeal) with all the ceremonies pertaining thereto; then they asked riddles, and such as were musically gifted sang songs. Agnes had a girl friend who sang second to her very well. Helen and Jeanie did not contribute to the music on this occasion, though the flute was brought into requisition once more. All through the evening Jock paid great attention to his sweetheart’s sister; but it seemed as if he were especially anxious to avoid causing remark about himself and Jeanie, for he scarcely noticed her. Jeanie, however, thought she understood his motives, and respected them.

Just once—when Jock was playing—Jeanie put in, simply and unconsciously, a request for the ‘Flowers of the Forest.’ Jock complied, carelessly enough; but when he had finished, Jeanie, who was sitting near him, said, low enough for only him to hear: “I *do* like that. That’s the first tune ever I heard ye play—do ye mind?”

“Hoot!—what way should I mind the like o’ that?”

They might have been bantering words, but to Jeanie’s ear they were spoken with a certain degree of crossness almost, which struck her rather unkindly; and she attempted no more reminiscences. Jock took the two sisters home again at night—one on either arm. It was bright starlight overhead, frosty and clear; the trodden snow in the wide plough-track was hard under their feet. It was a lovely winter night for a walk home; yet somehow, though in company of both sister

and lover, Jeanie's spirits were less good than usual, and she left all the conversation to the other two. Jock seemed to have lost his shyness now, and rattled away in his old manner, and Helen, though always quiet and staid, was not backward in answering him; though occasionally it was in a way that Jeanie's knowledge of her as well as her quick instinct felt to be intended to set him down.

"And how do ye like the Robbies, Nellie?" Jeanie said, once more feeling her way to a confidence, when they were having a few last words up-stairs before parting for the night.

"Are ye so very ill a—anxious about knowing?" said Helen, catching herself up quickly in a despised Scotticism.

"I would *like* to know—just," looking down.

"Well, I think old Mrs. Robbie would give me the doleful dumps to live with. That Miss Robbie seems a nicelike simple girl."

"I was mostly sure ye would like Agnes. She's so gentle and patient." After a somewhat lengthened pause: "Do you like John, Nellie?"

"Do you, Jeanie?" Jeanie could make nothing of the short incisive manner of Helen's question, but she answered honestly, if diffidently: "Yes. I think he's a real nice lad."

"Well then, if you ask for my candid opinion, *I don't.*"

So once more poor Jeanie's confidence was nipped in the bud.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THAT BOY."

THE weather cleared sufficiently to allow Helen to travel to Kessachie a few days afterwards.

Jeanie was sorry to part from her sister. And she felt besides a certain undefinable sensation of dissatisfaction when Helen's visit was over. It might have been that she had never been able to carry out the confidence for which she was yearning; which had been so near the surface, and yet had been always checked, and could get no further. And she had not altogether a happy impression of that last evening with the Robbies; and the few little remarks anent them which Helen had let fall, had left a sort of chill on poor Jeanie's heart. She did not feel lively during the time that immediately followed. The days passed in the same routine, and her duties tied her much to the house. Her cousin, usually so good-natured and serene, was apt to be fidgetty now, as his captivity lengthened; depressed also, and his altered spirits seemed to cast a weight, more or less, upon them all.

John Robbie too seemed in some mysterious way to be affected by the same influence, and was uncertain in his moods; he had not been coming in to them quite so often, and when he did, he confined himself in great measure to business matters. Certainly he came to Mr. Fyffe's church pretty regularly; but he did not seem inclined to prolong his talks with Jeanie afterwards, as at one time had been his wont. One day, a few weeks after that great fall of snow, he came in to Leslie's early, having been once more intrusted to visit a market on his account; and on this occasion, the market, one of some consideration, took place at Monthoolie.

"Have ye any message ye would like me to take to your sister?" he said in a casual sort of way, as he passed Jeanie at the door, on his way out.

"Ye'll not be going the length of Kessachie?" said Jeanie quickly.

"I'm no sure. I'll not get back the night whatever, likely—and I might as well run up and call for her—that is, if you have any commands for me—as do nothing."

"Well, really it's very mindful, John; I have a pair of stockings I was knitting to her, but they're not quite finished, and they'll go by post whatever. No; thanks, I'll not mind."

"Oh, *then*," quoth Jock, and walked off.

And Jeanie turned back into the room with a little lightening of heart. It was "real mindful" of poor Jock to think of her sister when he was going up that

way; all the same, she felt glad that she had not given him any errand to go up to Kessachie, since she could not be sure in what spirit Helen would receive "that boy."

It appeared, however, that Jock's not being able to get back the same night was a private arrangement to suit his own convenience; as when he did not appear in the evening by a late train, Leslie was exceedingly annoyed and even uneasy, till Jeanie innocently said: "He told me he wouldn't likely be able to win back the night, whatever."

"He told you!" cried Leslie. "It's you that's the head of the business, is it, Miss Jeanie? Did he tell ye anything else, pray, may I be allowed ask?"

"No. He just said that—and asked if I had any message to my sister at Kessachie, as he could as well run up there as do nothing."

"He did! And did ye give him any?"

"No, I'd none to give him—and 'deed I'm very sorry; but I'd no idea but that you knew yourself, Leslie."

"How would I know? No no, ye're not needin' to be sorry, my dear—there's no blame to you," for Jeanie stood looking rather downcast, and in truth feeling a little hurt. "What puts me mad with him is the impudence of the thing. What way he could dare to talk to you of messages to your sister and that, when he'd known it was all gammon, to suit his own convenience, and be a sort of blind 'less be I should enquire into it. No, no—he's just gone on the spree again;

and it's the last time he'll get leave to do it on my account."

Jeanie turned away—she had been standing beside Leslie's couch—quite silently, but with a little sound between a sigh and a sob. She went about her work mechanically, but with a kind of dull pain at her heart. Was Leslie going to dismiss poor Jock? He had been very angry last time Jock had misbehaved himself. And he was not a man who said what he did not mean, indulged himself with idle threats to relieve his anger. What would become of poor Jock? Would he lose the place? Would he go from bad to worse? Could he—

"Jeanie, my dear!"

Jeanie started from her reverie and turned round. She and Leslie were in the room alone just then; Katie having hopped after her grandmother into the kitchen.

"Ye're no vexing yourself, my dear, I hope, at anything I've said to you?"

"Oh no," said Jeanie, but the tone was low and tremulous.

"Ye know, I was far from meanin' to quarrel *you*."

"I know that"—in the same low tone, and with averted eyes.

He stretched out his hand then, and took hold of hers, gently but strongly. He felt that it was trembling, saw that she was trembling altogether with emotion which she could not repress.

"What's ado, my dear?" Leslie said, in his kindly tone, as though he had been speaking to Katie; and as Jeanie still kept silent, he continued: "If there's anything troubling ye, that I can mend, I would like ye should tell me."

Thus urged, Jeanie, still without looking at him, said: "Ye said ye was to put him away."

"Did I? No, I didn't say that, that I'm aware of. But indeed, my dear, if he's not to be a wise lad, and keep himself from bad ways, it'll be best for me and you both that he should be out o' this."

Jeanie drew herself up a little. "It was not for me to have spoken to ye of it, Leslie. Of course, you please yourself."

"There's no harm done, my dear. I think it's well we should understand each other—so far. I know ye've been real kind to the lad, and he couldn't be too grateful; but he would need to show himself servin' of—of your *friendship*, Jeanie, if that were the case. And for his own sake, as well as for the sake of those that take an interest in his welfare, it would be right of me to pass over his faults. So, if I give him a blowin' up, ye know"—(with a little laugh)—"surely he deserves it, ye needn't imagine I'm altogether unkind-hearted and bad-natur'd to him. Now, go ye on and don't trouble about it too sore—we don't know the ins and outs o' the story yet." He let go his hand with a little encouraging shake. And Jeanie, with her ways somewhat lightened in soul. She

nearer a confidence with that plain business man, her old step-cousin, than even with her girl-sister Helen. And there was a certain repose and comfort in thinking that Leslie understood and felt for her.

Jock did not appear that evening, nor throughout the next day. But late in the following, Mrs. Robbie sent over to say that "John was home, and would call early the morn's morning. He was not very well the night." Leslie forbore to comment upon the message. And next morning, Jeanie going out upon an early errand, met John coming up to the door. He was looking very pale and heavy-eyed and miserable, as on a former occasion; but besides this there was an expression of mingled dissatisfaction and ill-humour that Jeanie had never seen on his face before. He gave her the shortest possible recognition; then as he passed on and met Grannie, said, "I suppose I'll see Leslie."

"I suppose ye will," was the short answer.

Jeanie felt glad that her duties took her out of the house. But if a "blowing up" were in store for the luckless John, the interview began very quietly.

"So ye're here at last, John."

"I'm here at last," John answered with a sort of dogged coolness, as he sat down beside Leslie's sofa; and then he pulled out his pocket-book and plunged at once into business. Leslie went through it all very patiently; but when it was done, he said quietly, fixing a shrewd scrutinizing glance upon his brother-in-law:

"And now perhaps ye'll let me know how it was ye were not here Tuesday night."

"Missed my train."

"Yesterday morning?"

"Yesterday morning," repeated Jock, passing his hand over his brow, "I really was too unwell to rise. Ye'd have been sorry for me if ye could have seen me, I believe"—in a pathetic tone.

"Possibly. But I know fine, markets doesn't agree with you—and this will be the last I'll require ye to attend, for me."

"Indeed the market wasna to blame this time."

"Eh no; not the market of course."

"I protest it's the truth—I'm no carin' whether ye believe me or no. Ask any that saw me, if I didna leave the market all right."

"Then what way did ye no come back?"

"Amn't I tellin' ye? I missed the train."

"Business men don't miss the train, for common. What caused ye to miss her?"

"Well, if ye're just so particular—I was calling for friends."

"Didn't know ye had friends in that part to call for."

"Possibly no. I'm not bound to give ye a catalogue of all my acquaintance, I believe."

"Oh dear no. Only when a case of this sort arises, one naturally likes to enquire into it, ye see."

"Well, I've told you all that's necessary."

"To account for two days' absence?" said Leslie in

dry manner that Jock felt particularly "aggravating." Well, I suppose I'm to understand that it is the old story—your friends were too kind to ye, eh?"

'Nothing of the sort, then!' cried Jock impatiently. 'Too kind! it was horribly ill she treated me, awat, I just put me all wrong.'

'She'—it was a 'she,' was it?"

'I didn't say 'she,''" said the unscrupulous Jock.

'Ye did. Stick to truth, man. And pray who may e' be?"

'Really, Leslie, I'm not aware that it mak's anything you. We've finished our business together.' He said, as if to go.

'Stay a minutie, if *you* please, John. Ye maybe think I've not the right to question ye on the matter. It was yourself only was concerned, maybe I have—though considering our connection both in the way of business and out, I think I might be supposed have some interest in your affairs, for your own sake. Is it just mak's this, John: have you been payin' attentions to my cousin, Jean Ledingham, or have you not?"

Jock was silent, sulkily regarding his feet.

'Because,' Leslie continued, "just you look here. If I mean anything by those attentions—if your mind's upon winning her, and living worthy of her—well, I'll have my best encouragement and sanction: but I have no double games played in my house. I can see what's goin' on under my very eyes, though some

maybe don't think it. And I'll not see an honest good girl as ever lived, trifled with and deceived. So—if ye're no actin' on the square—if ye're to carry on any foolishness, ye'll drop it, or me and you will cut the connection. Ye understand?"

"If I understand, it's more than *you* do, what ye're speakin' of, Leslie. Suppose Jean Ledingham's no for me?"

"Suppose no. I'm aware she's far better to ye than ye deserve. I can see that, for as modest quiet a lassie as she is. But I should say ye're going the way to put her fro' being for ye—or any other right-thinking woman. I defy ye to stand there and tell me ye haven't been drinking, John—I see it in *your* face."

Jock flung himself down in the chair again and muttered under his breath some words which were not good. "And what's a man to do if he's miserable?" he exclaimed aloud.

"And pray what on this world's airth is to make *ye* miserable—unless yourself?"

"Just *her*," said Jock in a lachrymose tone, leaning his chin on his hands.

"Her!—what, Jeanie?"

"No. Helen."

The murder was out now.

"*Helen!!*" cried Leslie with many notes of exclamation in his tone. "Ye don't mean to tell me ye're after Helen?"

"And why no? Isn't Helen far above Jeanie, comparing one with other?"

"I scarcely know Helen," said Leslie quietly, "and you know her less, I would think. We've both seen something of Jeanie."

"Ay. But the very first day I saw Helen, I saw that there was something so superior, so lady-lookin' together—I said to myself, 'Yon's the girl for me.' Who would look at Jeanie when Helen's by?"

"Well, John Robbie, I would think shame to be you. And ye're to cast off Jeanie for her own sister, and tell me so?"

"Cast off Jeanie! Do ye think Jeanie and me's on trackit? Much you know. Jeanie's far too wily to ledge herself to me, mind you; she'll give me a smile one day, and a headshake the next—and just sort of lay with me, cat-and-mouse like."

"She's right enough to wait and see how ye conduct herself, or she'd give a promise to the like of you!" interrupted Leslie indignantly.

"Well, ye're not needing to put yourself about—for Helen's a nasty, hard, proud thing, for as handsome as he is; and I wouldn't have her now if she came kneelin' on her knees to me with a fortun' in her hand!" cried the inconsequent boy.

"Which is as much as say, she won't have you—come now, I'll not have swearin' here," for Jock again lost command of his tongue. "Ye've many things to do, and much need to amend yourself, before ye're fit

to look at any one of the Ledinghams—that very sairtain !”

A good deal more salutary advice Leslie bestowed upon his brother-in-law, which need not be detailed at length. Gradually he arrived at a sort of understanding of Jock’s not too creditable story : which in its completeness was as follows :

Jock had started for Monthoolie with the deliberate intention of going up to Kessachie to see Helen, train or no train : whether with the purpose of actually making her an offer, at first, may be doubtful. But with this intention, such as it was, he had so far spoken the truth when he said that he had left the market in a condition to take care of himself and to know what he was about. Jock Robbie, however, could not come out of a market entirely innocent of whiskey ; and he was one of those weak-headed individuals who cannot take the smallest allowance without feeling its effects. Consequently he had left Monthoolie in an exhilarated frame of mind, and with not a little artificial courage. He had no difficulty in getting a lift in one of the many gigs returning towards Kessachie ; whereby he presented himself, rather late in the afternoon, at the manse, audaciously requested to see Helen, saying that he was a friend, who had brought a message from Abermurchie ; and having obtained the desired interview, with very little circumlocution he made Miss Ledingham the offer of his hand, heart, and worldly prospects, in language far more impassioned than he had ever addressed to poor Jeanie.

The astonishment and indignation of the stately and severe Helen can be easier imagined than portrayed; as well as the withering scorn with which she received the proposal. She!—with her high principle and uncompromising propriety of ideas and manners, and lady-like feelings, and lofty aspirations, and—must we add, pre-engaged affections?—*she* to be insulted by a wild, senseless proposal from a half-tipsy boy, almost a stranger to her, and not even her equal by birth! Quiet and maidenly and dignified she could not help being, then as always; but she was excessively angry beneath it all, and dismissed poor Jock with a few words of terribly calm, lofty indignation; in desperate inward fear of Mr. Argo seeing him, or indeed any of the family—and imagining that he was in any way a friend of hers. It is to be feared that after his humiliation and disappointment, Jock’s immediate consolation was sought and found in the nearest inn; which may possibly have accounted for his tardy return home.

It was a version of this story—though a considerably softened one—that Leslie elicited before their conversation ended: Jock winding up by expressing his desire that Leslie would mention nothing of this to Jeanie.

“Not I,” was the reply. “I interfere with no man’s love affairs behind his back; and if Jeanie doesn’t hear of it from her own sister, she’ll not do so from me. But she’s not a fool, and she’ll be perfectly aware that ye’ve transgressed—in the other way; whether I speak of it or no. So ye must settle your own affairs; only

if you take my advice, you'll keep out of the way in the meantime, till ye see if ye can earn a right to her good opinion, and others'. Ye've made a fool of yerself, and worse; and ye'd best go home and think it well over—and let it be a caution in future."

With which salutary counsel Jock had to be satisfied; and he departed humbly enough, without encountering Jeanie again.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN OPENING.

DOCK certainly acted upon his brother-in-law's advice far as to keep himself out of Jeanie's way "in the meantime." He only came to see Leslie for necessary business, and found, moreover, that these business visits were less frequently necessary now than formerly. He never staid for tea, or sought Jeanie out at by-ones; he seemed to be waiting in a sort of *locus sententiæ*, as it were, till the last unfortunate episode should be forgotten.

But Jeanie never heard of it, in so far as concerned her sister. Helen would not have mentioned it to her living soul, on any account. She would have been ashamed of it; and besides she thought the whole matter only deserving of ignominious oblivion.

The time which followed was signalized by Leslie's being promoted to leave his couch and try his foot to ground; a change which he appreciated as much as Katie had formerly done. He was not allowed, however, to walk any distance, and had not yet been beyond the door of his house for a little fresh air.

It seemed, however, as if he were no sooner to be off the sofa than Katie was to occupy it again. For either she had been too reckless in her use of her newly-acquired activity, or the cold had struck into some weak point; for about that time she began to complain that one of her knees "was sore": which when Dr. Spence heard of, he prescribed a good deal of rest and much curtailment of the walking powers. Poor Katie was much disappointed, and although she was sweet-tempered as usual, she could not altogether help a little fretfulness sometimes: the more so as the knee was rather painful, and for some months past she had been unusually free from pain.

Jeanie's visit home seemed to be postponed *sine die*. For besides that Leslie still required a good deal of waiting on, and that Katie was less independent again, about this time Agnes Robbie caught a very severe cold, ending in bronchitis. Whenever she could spare an hour, Jeanie flew to her friend's bedside to solace her hours of weary suffering as well as to relieve Mrs. Robbie, whose nights' rest was a good deal broken by poor Agnes' cough. On these occasions, too, Jeanie would take up and carry on Agnes' work which was of course at a standstill; and thus render a double service to the poor girl, for which Agnes was inexpressibly grateful to her. It was clearly not the time for poor Jeanie to be spared.

On one of these occasions, when Jeanie had gone over to the Robbies', Agnes greeted her with some

gerness, and said, "Jock bid me be sure, if ye came day, to bid ye not go till he come in. He's very about seeing ye."

"It'll depend what time he comes in," Jeanie said her stiffly; for in fact, considering Jock's behaviour late, she thought the message a little cool.

"He'll not be late the day. He wants to see ye *y* particularly," Agnes said in breathless eagerness. "You *must* stop, Jeanie dear."

"I shall try, if *you* wish it, Agnes."

"Yes, I do. Ye know, I don't think poor Jock has en altogether happy, this while. I don't know if it's a health, or what it is, just exactly: I know he's been terrible vexed about the last time he slipped—for one thing; but I know for sairtain no one in this world can do him so much good as yourself can, Jeanie."

Jeanie was silent. Her influence upon Jock had seemed latterly to go for little; but since he had sought to speak to her so particularly, she hoped that she might be able to help him.

He came home before Jeanie's time was up. And then he begged her at once to come out with him. They had not had a walk for a long time; partly from bad weather, partly from other causes.

"I've something I want to speak to ye about," he began, as he led her off in the old fashion. "I've not been able to get a word with ye this long while—for what with yon dour auld wifie, and Leslie never being out o' the bit, and Katie always in the ro'd, we never

have a minute to ourselves! I'll wager they make a right drudge of ye amongst the lot o' them! Faith, I declare you're lookin' quite white and done out—ye'll be a heap better of a change, I believe, as well as myself!"

"I hope I'll get a change home or long," said Jeanie simply.

"Ye might have a better than that, if ye like—That's my business with you the day, whatever. I'm growin' thoroughly tired of the life I'm leading—and I'm going to make a change altogether."

"What sort of a change?"

"Well, look you here. My oldest brother that's in America—and been doin' right well for himself this while—has written advisin' me very strongly to come out there—told me, in short, of a very good opening—and I've made up my mind to go."

"Eh, ye have?" said Jeanie with a little gasp. "Have ye spoken to Leslie?"

"Just you never mind about Leslie. I've spoken to *you* in the first place, Miss—seein' as how you're the party most interested next to myself, I believe. What do ye say to that for a change? Will ye come?"

"To America—me—us?" said poor Jeanie, taken quite aback.

"Well, and what's hinderin'? What's there in goin' to America? 'Tis the easiest thing in the world."

"I never thought about it," Jeanie was beginning slowly, and stopped.

"Maybe no; but I want ye to think about it now, do ye see? And ye'll find how easy it is, and how much better for us both, than going hangin' on, hangin' on here all our blessed lives. Here I'm injurin' my health every day that I stick at the beastly old hole—and no chance of a rise either, with a fellow like Leslie over one. Of course ye could never think I meant to keep on at it; and I knew something would turn up, if I kept my eyes open; but this, just now, is a kind of stroke of good luck that doesn't often fall in my way. So what I wanted was, Jeanie, my dear, without any delay to put it before ye—and if ye can make it all right—by the inside of a month, ye know—we'll just be off."

"Be off—a month—" gasped poor Jeanie, open-mouthed with dismay and amazement.

"Why no? Tuts, girl, ye look as scared as gin I was askin' ye to rob the bank! We can get married, all square, under a month, can't we? by old Fyffe, or the Beeshop himself an' ye like—I'm pairfitly willin'—"

"Oh! John, how can I—so soon—and my mother doesn't even know?"

"Whose blame is that? Not mine—I never hinnered your tellin' yer mother. It doesn't take long to do that, whatever." Jeanie was silent. She felt, it must be confessed, quite thunderstruck at Jock's proposal, which perhaps was only natural.

"Of course, I daresay it's a thought to ye at first,

lassie," he went on, in a more soothing tone; "but it's only what hundreds do every day. I'm aware I might go myself and see what like it is, but if me and you put what we have together, don't you see, it makes a little more to start on, and with what old Leslie would lend us—I'm sure he'd do that at once if I asked him—it would be a very tidy little beginning."

"I wouldn't like to begin by borrowing—from Leslie or any other body," said Jeanie, remembering certain loans casually referred to by Aunt Annie. "It would just be a weight round my neck till I'd paid it off."

"Hoot toots! ye needn't be so thin-skinned. What would Leslie miss it supposin' it wasn't paid off?—but the way ye make money out there, likely ye could pay it with interest, if ye like, in no time."

Jeanie considered for a few moments; at last she said, very gravely, but in earnest:

"Ye must forgive me, John, if I say I cannot bring my mind to it all at once. I have my friends' wishes to consider, and my mother—so new left her lone. I would like to think well over everything; and I *do* think, John," she added, "you would be better to take advice yourself, from some older and better experienced person, for ye *are* young, ye know, and so am I."

"Is *that* all ye've to say to me?" he cried testily. "You are a nice one to lean upon. Here I tell ye I've had advice from my brother, that knows the country—a chance thrown in my way—and ye're to do nothing but raise difficulties and doubts, and look like a scared

ep—faith, I doubt I've made a mistake wi' you, nie. You don't half care for me."

"Oh John, if only ye could tell," poor Jeanie sighed. "only ye knew what way I have been thinkin' of ye while!"

Blest if I see the use of your thinkin' if it only is ye to put difficulties in my way."

"If I was sure it was right, and safe for *you*," Jeanie sat on. "But I've heard, ye know, that a man needs be so strong that would go out to seek his fortune in se parts; and for another thing, John, he must be ady—I dare say I'll make ye angry at me, but I st say what I feel. Ye haven't been just quite firm, 'ye promised me last time. And there's many temptons, I'm aware, out there, that me and you knows le about; and maybe fewer helps, of *another* kind. I r't know if I'm puttin' it all as I should, but I feel myself."

"Ye're a terrible wise woman, I'm aware," said Jock, something more like his old caressing manner; "but men can't enter into these things like men. And far as me keepin' steady—let me once get started there, and a tidy little wife, like some person I ow, aside me—I'll do *far* better—I've every chance—an muddlin' on here like a horse in a mill. So come n, Jeanie, and say ye're agreeable, like the good lass ook ye for."

Once more Jeanie hesitated. In truth she shrank vardly from the idea far more than she liked to

acknowledge. But it was hard to her to have to refuse Jock anything, especially as he seemed to take her hesitation in bad part. Yet one more consideration stayed her.

"I hardly know if I would be doing right, the way we are now, in leaving so suddenly. Ye see, Katie hasn't been feeling so well this while—and she doesn't like to want me, I know, because she doesn't like me speaking of going home even, just now."

"Katie!" cried Jock impatiently, "Katie, indeed! Is that whinjing,* petted, penurious† thing to stand between us and our prospects for life?"

"Oh, John, how can ye speak so of the poor wee lammie? And 'deed ye know we're some frightened about her knee. Dr. Spence says if it were growin' sore he would like it worse than the trouble she had before."

"Ah well, of course, poor thing—I know she's bound aye to have some trouble or another; but for all that I don't see why you're to be sacrificed altogether. Leslie can afford to pay a regular sick-nurse—the first in town—if he chooses. And it 'll make no odds to her in the end, ye're pairfitly aware."

"Indeed, John, I don't see how I could reconcile it to my conscience just to leave her all at once. Suppose she grew worse and fretted for me, and me away—I would have reflections. And ye see I undertook the charge of her—and now to throw her over would seem so cruel."

* whinjing.

† used to mean peevish, pining.

uel! Awat ye don't think what's cruel by *me*! know fine—it's just the way of you. Leslie, e, Katie—any of them comes first, and poor Jock o to the wall! Hang me, if I don't think ye're ld Leslie and his money!"

ie turned round upon him with burning face, ivering in every nerve. "How would ye dare, -how would ye *dare* speak that way to me?"

ll, prove that I'm wrong then; it's easy done."

at would I say?" said the poor girl, almost g her hands. "It's no possible ye can love me ult me so!"

ve! I don't think there's much love with you, to n the way you've done this day! But deeds is than words, and if you're the true girl I once t, you'll show it—if not, I'll swear it's as I said."

ie stopped in her walk, and stood silently, her sly-clenched hands and troubled face giving e of the conflict within. A manly, generous ould have respected her scruples, have given her o collect her thoughts and consider. But John was neither manly nor generous. He watched kind of evil satisfaction the shame and unhap- his cruel taunt had caused to her sensitive s: watched for its effect impatiently, saying at "Come now, which is it to be? I can't wait all : an answer."

n she lifted her honest eyes to his face and slowly and gravely. "Very well, John. If my

mother doesn't forbid me, when she knows all—then I shall try and do as you wish.”

“That's right—that's spoken like a wise girl,” said Jock. “But ye'll settle it at once with your friends?—because, ye know, delay won't do with me.”

“Yes, of course. As soon as I possibly can. I would seek home for a day, if they could let me, to-morrow; but if I *am* going with you, ye know, I would have to go home at once and get prepared—so I think I'll just write my mother—by first post.”

“Very good; only look sharp about it.”

That was all he said: little knowing what the promise had cost Jeanie. And they parted almost immediately thereafter, Jeanie hastening back to her home duties.

CHAPTER XX.

SANDY LEDINGHAM'S LETTER.

WHEN Jeanie, with flushed cheeks and rather grave countenance, entered the house, she was received by Aunt Annie somewhat shortly.

"So, ye're back at last, lassie—and time ye was. Katie's terrible fretty the night; I doubt she's got the cold all through her; and she'll not go to her bed or you come—and she's sore needin' it."

Jeanie hastened in. Leslie was sitting by the fire with his little girl on his knee, her attitude betokening restlessness and weariness; her little face puckered up with that sad, continuous, voiceless crying which is perhaps the most pitiful expression of child-suffering.

"What ails my pettie?" said Jeanie, tenderly. "Is he not well?"

"Ay; she's real unwell," said Leslie, without looking up. "She's some fevered, I think,"—passing his hand over her brow; "see what a heat is in her headie; and he can't hold herself from greetin' with the pain in her knee. Hist ye, Jeanie, and take her to bed, that's

a lady—and syne Grannie will have a nice hot drinkie to her.”

Jeanie held out her arms for the light burden; for Leslie did not trust himself yet to carry her. Jeanie put her to bed as easily and deftly as she could, but poor Katie was certainly unusually “fretty,” and no thing seemed to give her relief.

Jeanie did not get much sleep that night. Her own thoughts were in a tumult, and I think she would have rested little even without poor Katie’s constant startings and moans and calls for a drink. She had quite resolved on writing the first thing next day to her mother; for indeed she could ill have been spared that day. And she resolved, too, till the answer came to say nothing to any one else. If her mother and brother consented, she felt sure Leslie would raise no difficulties either for herself or Jock: if not, there was no need that the circumstance should be known at all.

So Jeanie set herself to the composition of her letter; not the easiest task. And when it was gone, she awaited the answer with anxiety greater than she had ever before felt respecting a letter. Her heart shrank it must be confessed, from all that her promise to Jock would entail, if permission were given; at the same time she still more dreaded the consequences of a refusal. Her honest little heart loved and clung to the youth of her choice—her first young love—with a strength and a faithfulness which his shallow nature could little fathom or appreciate: she loved him enough!

to be ready to give up home, country, mother, family, and the little invalid charge who had become as dear to her as a sister; but she could not make this sacrifice without pain to her tender loving heart, without the shrinking which a quiet home-loving nature feels from a venturesome unknown enterprise.

Jock came to the house next day, and each day that he waited for the answer, but they had little talk together; and, as far as she could see, he was in a state of nervous irritability, consequent probably on the suspense.

But on the third day the answer came, and Jeanie ran up to her disused attic to read it. It was addressed by her brother Sandy; and when she opened it she saw, rather to her disappointment, that the whole letter was written by him.

It ran as follows :

"MY DEAR JEANIE,

"Mother desires I will write in reply to your letter of the 27th inst. duly received. Its contents caused us not a little surprise; and I must say that mother felt a little hurt that you should never have mentioned the young man's name before, and him been paying his addresses to you for so long. However, as you say you was only waiting to speak till you came home, she is ready to acquit you of any intention of concealment.

"With regard to the main point of your letter, mother and I have looked at it every way, and thinking it well over, we cannot give our consent to you

marrying at once and going out to America. Before doing so we would require to be very sure to whom we were intrusting our girl's happiness. Robbie is very young, for one thing; you will say that is a fault that is aye mending, and so it is; none of your friends has any real acquaintance with him, but from what I saw with my own eyes last year at S. Servan's fair I can tell that he is not just very steady. You know what an abhorrence our father had at the slightest approach to drink, and we have all great cause to be thankful for his teaching and example. My mother feels that he would never have knowingly sanctioned the union of one of his daughters with a man who was given that way; and in emigration there are many risks and chances, more than in life at home, which to overcome successfully a man must above all things be sober and steady. At the same time mother says she does not command you to give him up altogether, if he is willing to try and deserve you. You are both very young, and it will do you no harm to wait a little if you are truly attached to each other. What she would think the most natural and proper arrangement would be—that if he is now bent on emigration, he should go out by himself and try his fortune alone, which would be far easier for him at first; and then after a few years, say, if he is living steady and doing well in the business he has chosen, you could go out to him and be married there. I do not say but it would be a sore heart to mother to send you so far away, but she is aware with so many children she cannot keep them all at home, and she would never stand in the way of the real advancement and happiness of any one of them. And she feels, and I may say the same for my-

self, in the present case we believe we are acting for our real welfare, and hope you will acknowledge the same.

“Your affect. brother,
“ALEX. LEDINGHAM.”

Yes!—no doubt it was all quite true, and mother and Sandy must know best, and be right: but poor Jeanie's young heart, brave and self-forgetting in its trustful love, cried out in spite of herself at the hardness of the sentence. And how should she damp poor Jock's eager hopefulness? How should she face him and tell?

That telling, however—it must be got over at once. Jock's coming in was uncertain: she could not speak to him alone in the house: so she thought the best way would be to seek him out at once in the office, where he would certainly be at that hour. She pocketed her letter, and saying to Aunt Annie that she “wanted out for a few minutes a message,” she set off with a sinking heart.

Jock opened the door for her at once, but a customer was in the place paying a bill, so she had to wait till it was duly receipted. It was a trial; and she fancied that in their one meeting glance her lover had read something unfavourable; for he seemed nervous too, and the “J. R. *pro* Leslie Esslemont” which the old waiter carried away on his bill was certainly somewhat impulsively penned. Almost before the door had closed on him, Jock turned to Jeanie with an impatient, “Well, what answer? for it's come, I can see.”

"Oh John, I am so sorry to have to tell ye. My mother quite refuses consent."

"What?" cried Jock aghast. And then he forgot himself and the presence of Jeanie, and gave expression to his feelings in words that shocked and hurt her to hear. She went up and laid her hand on his arm. "Hush, John! I will not remain to hear ye speak so."

"Ah! it's all very well you comin' with your 'hush' and your 'whisht' and your pious faces—just you put yourself in my place, and see how pleasant it is to be thwarted and hinnered at every turn! I daresay you're precious glad—you were none so ill about goin', and like enough let them see."

"Indeed I said all I could, John. It is themselves, not me."

"Where's the letter?" was his next abrupt demand. "Will I read it?"

Jeanie drew it out. "I believe ye may. There's nothing I'm ashamed of your seeing, whatever, John—only maybe ye'll not be pleased at the plain speakin', but they mean it for good."

Jock almost snatched the letter from Jeanie's hand—glanced half-contemptuously at the signature, then hastily scanned the pages, with little mutterings of displeasure, finally throwing it down on the desk before him. "Well, I'm sure—I'm sure I *am* obliged to them! A nice arrangement they propose! If ever I haired the like of that, I—oh! hold your hands off me, girl! I'll say what I choose! What! I may go out there my lone.

toil and slave all my best years to make a fortune for you, while you sit at home as snug and easy as can be, and put by just what pleases ye to save from spending on your braws; and then, if I survive—when the home's all ready and grand, ready for ye to step into, and sit down like a lady—ye'll maybe do me the honour of comin' out to be married! Really I *am* obliged to your friends and you both for the offer, but I couldn't accept so much generosity!"

Poor Jeanie stood, gravely miserable, twisting her hands together. "What can I do, John?" she asked pitifully. "What can I do?"

"What can ye do? Do ye ask me? Well—now I'll tell ye what ye can do—what a girl of spirit would do. Say to them that you're sorry to differ, and so on, but you've given your heart and your plighted word to John Robbie, and you'll not throw him over, for them or any other body."

"No more will I throw ye over, John. Ye see what they say. But what way could I go against my mother's express command now? I couldn't expect a blessing, far less bring you one, if I came to ye like that—in the face of my plain duty, to my only remaining parent."

"There's no word of your duty and promise to *me*," said Jock sulkily. "Of course that counts for nothing, with you pious folks."

"Not at all. Ye mind, I only promised subject to my mother's consent."

"Which I suppose ye never expected, or wished to obtain, false-hearted woman that ye are!" he exclaimed angrily. "I see the game now. I might have seen it afore, only I was fool enough to expect better of you—to think you really loved me, and would give up something for me."

"So I would, John, anything—anything if it was only myself—but my plain duty. Oh, is it just *detairmined* that ye must go now?"

"What, *I'll* give up my prospects and sacrifice my life, will I?—and to be told at the end of it all that I was never promised, but under such and such condeetions that it's not possible to fulfil them! I wonder ye have the face to stand and ask the like of such things at me! *Detairmined* indeed! If you cared for me one grain—"

"Oh! if I could but let ye know!" Jeanie cried. "Whatever I say ye take me up wrong. It would be a very very sore heart to me to let ye go—to see ye go away your lone, without me; and indeed for your own self I would think ye were better to consider of it and stop where ye are, at least for a time; but if you are *detairmined* ye must go, I must submit—but I'm willing to wait for ye, John, though it should be years—ye'll find me true—others have had to wait besides us—and been happy in the end."

"Wait!—no, thanks!" he cried. "No waitin' for me. I want a girl who will stick to me—who's ready to cast in her lot with mine, and take her share of the burden; and if I can't get her here" (with an oath) "I'll go without

her! I'll get my choice out over there, I'll wager, and plenty! It's now or never, Miss, I'll have ye understand—and I'll give ye one more offer; now. Put up your traps to-night, and come into the town with me and I'll get a leecense—we'll be married to-morrow, and sail to-morrow night. I'll make it all right—ye'll never repent it, Jeanie. Plenty has done the same; and they'll never think the worse of you out there. We'll have the world before us; and in less time than you think we'll have made our fortune, and can come back if we choose and hold up our heads wi' the best of them."

For a moment Jeanie's brain seemed to reel. She was, as we know, a religious, high-minded, steady-natured and strictly brought up young girl; yet none the less was this wild proposal a real and tangible temptation. Her very faithfulness made it so; for she had given her young heart to John Robbie, scamp though he had shown himself to be, and she could not help clinging to him yet.

"Come, Jeanie, my lassie, say ye will. We'll forget all that's by—all that I said to ye when I was angry and miserable. It was only my love for ye drove me to it. It's not too late yet, if ye really love poor Jock, and don't wish him to go to ruin. Come, my dearie—be the lassie ye used," and he put his arm round her and kissed her in the old way. "It's only just to bring your mind to it—and once we're off ye'll never repent it. Come, be my own brave lassie!"

Very pale and sad, but firm and brave withal, was

Jeanie when she spoke then. "No, John," she said very low; "I have told you before that I love you, and that I would give up anything myself, but I cannot do wrong to please you even, and this would be wrong."

"Then ye'll not come, after all?" he exclaimed, almost pushing her from him. "You are a nice one, as I've said, and a nice talk ye'll raise about yerself in this blessed town! Ha! just fancy what Pennie Spence'll make of ye—she that was aye teetin' at her attic window, when me and you was taking our walks by the river—ah, I mind fine! Ye'll have a heap worse to take at their hands than if ye was comin' right away and no more about it! But it's no use speaking—I've been deceived in you all along, Jean Ledingham. Ye never loved me."

"What way can ye be so cruel?" sobbed poor Jeanie, driven almost to despair. "I have done what I could—I have promised ye to be true—to wait;—I'm sure I would never think of any other body—"

"Think of as many as ye like, for me!" he cried. "Ye've refused my plain offer, as fair as I could say it, and ye needn't think I'm to hang on any longer. If ye'll not have me now, ye needn't think to wait for me—ye understand that pairfitly—ye understand me?"

"Yes, John Robbie," she said, standing up grave and sad. "I understand that it is your wish that all should be at an end between us. It is not my wish, neither my doin'—but if you will have it so, I understand—and I agree."

'That's a blessing, for once! I'm glad you can be sonable. I believe it's the best thing for us both, me and you don't seem like to suit." And as anie was turning away he added: "One thing more ll understand. There's to be no word of my affairs to Leslie or any others. They're nothing to you n—and I'll not have my arrangements discussed."

'I think ye might trust me," Jeanie said, as she nt towards the door. He stepped forward to open

"Ye're for away, now—ye're quite right. This a dull kind of place to stop in. It'll have more erest for you, no doubt, when the principal returns it."

'Is that to be your last word to me, John?" said anie, turning upon him a look of sorrowful reproach at might have touched the hardest.

'Oh, sorra tak' last words!—the fewer of them the ter. Well, good-bye, then, in the meantime."

'Ye must let me say this,"—her voice trembled she spoke: "May God guide ye to good, and forgive your hard thoughts of me."

He did look a little ashamed then, but tried to hide under a ceremonious bow as Jeanie went out, and shut the office door behind her.

Poor Jeanie hastened mechanically home with a kind stunned feeling of hopeless misery, a feeling as if she re in a strange dream. She had expected displeasure, appointment, waiting: but not this. There was no edy for her present trouble. Had it been otherwise,

she might have made some new effort : she might have gone home to her mother and implored her to reconsider her decision. But that was of no use now. John Robbie, for whom she would have given up home and country and kindred, had given her to understand that her devotion was not worth having, her love not worth waiting for. Therefore there was nothing to be done—nothing.

And then over the poor girl's heart began to steal another, an almost worse pain, a new and terrible sense of shame : the sting of his cruel cowardly words beginning to make itself felt. It was terrible to her in proportion as she was innocent and pure-minded and true. Was it indeed the case that she was compromised by the breaking of that tacit, unacknowledged, but no less evident engagement?—that the idle tongues of gossip and scandal might be busy about her name ? She felt as if, though no word were ever spoken, she could scarcely bring herself to face her daily companions—her cousin, who had understood and sympathized with her engagement ; the keen-eyed and outspoken old aunt, who had at first warned her against her faithless lover. But they must be faced—and here was the house-door before her. A voice too many she heard in the living-room : almost like the echo of her unhappy thoughts. For Miss Spence was there, bending very fondly over Katie, who was again on her father's knees : the only place where she was quite satisfied, for the last two days she had not been walking at all.

"Don't you think, provost," Miss Spence was saying, "that a complete change would be the thing for her—complete change?" and she laid her hand tenderly on his arm.

"I doubt it's too early in the season," Leslie answered. "and it would be too much fatigue and annoy to her, to travel the way she is just now. She'll scarcely be spared a minute out of my arms, this two days."

"Ah, you spoil her, provost, you know! I always spoil you so; but I do hope you'll think it over. And what I meant to say was, if you and papa will agree together about it, I'm ready *any* day you name, to take the entire charge of my pet—and it would let me have Jeanie Ledingham away for her holiday, so long as I pleased—ah! here she is to speak for herself!"

But Jeanie did not stay to speak for herself. On finding that she was not immediately wanted, she turned and went up-stairs to her harbour of refuge, the attic. At Annie made use of the attic now. For since he had become independent again, Leslie had gone back to his own room; and Katie was reinstalled in her sleeping-place. But Katie had become used to Jeanie at night now and would not "want" her; and her, Grannie preferred trusting Jeanie's quick ears to her own, so she had virtually changed rooms with Jeanie and went up-stairs to sleep. Jeanie, however, still kept her "kist" in the attic, and knew she might use the room at any time when she wished to be alone.

She knelt down by the wall-bed, where she used to say her prayers, and tried to pray now in her sore trouble: but words would not come—only that dull stunned sense of misery. She had known grief before, and bereavement; but never unkindness, or the soreness of a wounded spirit. She had been accustomed for long past to pray so much for John Robbie—as one who belonged to her, whose life was bound up with her own. She could not leave off praying for him now, but it must be as a stranger—one whom she might never meet again on the old familiar terms. He did not love her now: indeed he could never have loved her as she counted love, or as she loved him. Otherwise this would never have parted them. Indeed his love was of that selfish summer-day kind that will not stand the test of obstacles, even if he had not been already growing tired of poor Jeanie. He was unstable by nature, and never liked the same place or occupation long; so it was the same with his love, which the sight of a prettier face, the chance of a more advantageous connection, was able at any time to divert from its first object. Jeanie indeed had never known of his treacherous visit to her sister; but she felt now that an undefinable sense of something disappointing, something altered in her relations with Jock, had been forcing itself upon her for some time. She was deeply wounded, sorely hurt by his coldness and faithlessness, and yet she could not at once change, or turn against him, or believe him so bad as he appeared: in fact, she could not see, as any of her

ends would have seen for her, that what had happened was really a fortunate circumstance for her.

And then she thought of Agnes, the friend with whom she was already on a sisterly footing. Would Agnes turn against her? She loved Jeanie, but she had devoted heart and soul to Jock, as was also his mother. She would hear Jock's version of the story, if any, and believe it: and how would she receive Jeanie that day or for some time to come, even though Agnes was still confined to her bed.

Jeanie rose at length and bathed her face and went down-stairs. She would not go into the living-room as long as she heard Miss Spence's voice there; but turned to the kitchen and found some work for herself over the fire, to cool her cheeks.

She kept up bravely through the day, though she could not look or feel as usual. It was a relief at any rate that Jock did not find it necessary to call and see her that day.

'What's ado with Jeanie?' Leslie asked his mother when Jeanie was not by.

'I'm sure I dinna know,' said the old lady. 'Is there anything?'

'She's not looking like her usual,' said Leslie, 'nor has she been, these three-four days. I say, mother, I'll really need to let her home' soon's ever Katie gets over this turn.'

'I'm sure I'm willin' enough. But ye see the way

the child carries on, if she's only out by to Mrs. Robbie's an hour, and the way she is now she'd fret herself wrong a' thegither if Jeanie was away a night, I believe."

"Poor little lass!" said Leslie with a deep sigh. "I wonder if Pennie Spence is really right about a change to her. Katie'll no go with *her*, that's one thing sairtain—but if I thought—. The doctor doesna say much, ye see."

"The doctor doesna like her leg," Mrs. Peter said.

"I believe that. I don't like it myself. Ye mind, mother, it was a sore knee her mother took, last thing before Katie was born."

"Hm-hm," said Grannie with a sorrowful shake of the head.

And soon they became absorbed in thinking of Katie: and poor Jeanie's changed looks passed out of their minds. Katie's eyes, however, were not less sharp than her father's; for when Jeanie had put her to bed, and was tucking her up finally, Katie asked: "Are ye no well the day, Jeanie dear? ye've been looking so sad-like."

"My head's sore, I think," said Jeanie, putting her hand to her brow. "It's been stounin'" (throbbing) "some the night."

"Poor Jeanie!" said the child, taking her cousin's face in her two hands. "*My* Jeanie!"

"Ye love Jeanie? she said, bending low over her. Poor girl, her heart was indeed "breaking for a littl love."

"Yes, oh, yes! and ye'll not leave me, will ye?"

"Maybe not, dear. Ye're glad I should stay?"

"Eh yes! Miss Spence wants to take me away somewhere, and let you home. And I'm not for away—more than that, I'm not goin' with Miss Spence. I don't like her, neither does Dada. You're not wantin' me, are ye, Jeanie?"

"Well, ye know, I've not seen my mother and little sister this long while, so of course I would like, sometime, over to see them—but I'll not seek till you're better. I say, Katie," with a sudden thought, "how would ye like to come home with *me*, if Dada lets ye? That would be a right change, over to Deeside—and we'd be together."

"Over to cousin Margaret—to the farm?" said Katie. "Y—es" (deliberating), "I think I *would* like Cousin Margaret's not cross, is she?"

"My mother! Oh, Katie, never. She would love so—and Lizzie and the little ones would be fit to go with ye."

"And would I see the kye milkit, and the hennies and chickenies meated?" (fed) "I would like that fine. I never stopped at a farm, but I've read about it, and ye've told me, ye know, and Grannie."

"Eh yes. We'd see lots of nice things. And the garden's fine over there."

"I'll go then. Only I must grow able to walk again first. It's awful bothering not to walk, now Dada can't help me. And my knee's aye so sore—Jeanie, I

think I'll have a knee like yon horsie in the gipsy cart—do ye mind?"

"Eh no, Katie—not like that."

"He'd an awful knee. And they made him pull the cart. Do ye think it was sore?" she added with a child's tender sympathy.

"I don't know, Katie—I hope not. But ye must shut your eyes and fall over asleep or ye'll grow off your sleep again, and be unwell to-morrow."

"Yes. I'll go to sleep now. Ye know, Dada's goin' to his office the morn. I would have *liket* to have gone down with him, to see 'at he was all right, ye know—but I can't. But I think Uncle Jock will come and take him down. Good-night, Jeanie—kissie!" as she put up her little mouth to Jeanie.

And then she turned round on her pillow and shut her eyes; and Jeanie was thankful to see "fell over" sooner than sometimes. Jeanie knelt on for some time beside the bed: as she finally took a last watchful look, before lying down, at the little face stamped with the indelible impress of life-long suffering, feeling an impulse of relief that at least she would not now be called on to add, by her departure, one drop to its cup of bitterness.

CHAPTER XXI.

LESLIE GOES TO HIS OFFICE.

LE was prepared to go down to his office next
5.

thought that fella Jock would have been here
me his arm," he said, as he buttoned up his
but he's maybe gone down first. There's no
' upon the road the day, whatever."

then he kissed Katie, bidding her "grow better
me back," and set off.

emed quite strange to the women-folk to miss
er the many weeks during which he had been
onstant companion. Katie in particular, was
" and did not find any resting-place so much
taste as Dada's knee; and besides her ordinary
feanie had a good deal to do to please and
her, which at any rate gave occupation to her
nd helped to distract her mind from anxious
abling thoughts.

t mid-day, rather to their surprise, Leslie looked
ng shortly, "Robbie been here?" and on re-

* slipperiness.

ceiving an answer in the negative: "Very strange. He hasna been near the office yet; and he's not at home, for I sent up to let him know I was there."

Jeanie, who was present, felt her cheeks glow with a sort of guilty consciousness. She could guess something of the reason of Jock's absence: he might even be planning a sudden departure; but she was forbidden to speak of his movements, in so far as she knew of them.

"Have ye been over wi' Agnes the day, Jeanie, my dear?"

Jeanie started and turned from red to white. "No, I have not—neither yesterday."

"Ah, I only thought, might be, ye might have heard something of him. Well, I'll away back and see if he's maybe come in."

So he turned and went. It was late in the lengthening spring day when he came home; and when he did, he looked so fagged and harassed that his mother said:

"My! Leslie, ye're surely overdone."

"I'm just terribly bothered and perplexed," Leslie said, sitting down in his arm-chair. "I don't understand it at all. I find now he went into town by first train, with a single ticket—that's the curious part of it. And there's other things I can't make out, forbye—but I'm not to speak of them till I know. I'll have to go into town myself the morn, whatever."

"Are ye able for it, Leslie? Ye're no hurting yer leg?"

"I must go, leg or no leg—no, I don't believe it'll hurt me. No one can do one's business like oneself.

And unfortunately Shand's away to Macbryde this week, ye know. But I'll bring Mr. John to book the morn or I'm much mistaken."

The rest of the evening passed very silently. Leslie was evidently depressed as well as tired, and as usual his little family circle took their keynote from him. Even Katie was subdued, and though she claimed to be taken on Dada's knee, before she was put to bed, she failed to rouse him from his abstraction, and forbore either to chat or to complain.

Next morning saw Leslie start off early, and he was absent most of the day. His mother said little, and Jeanie nothing at all, though she had never felt more anxiously miserable in her life; for she could not help connecting herself still with Jock and his strange behaviour, fearing that their parting of two days previous had to do with it in some way.

At last Leslie came home, late in the afternoon. And though he was always very quiet and deliberate and self-controlled, both his mother and Jeanie could see that something was much amiss.

"Well, I've traced him so far," were his first words when he came in. "He took his passage for New York yesterday—sailed last night."

"Eh! and what on airth had possessed him to do he like o' that?" exclaimed Grannie.

"No good, I doubt. Any way, he's gone off with some twenty or thirty pounds of my money."

"Eh! ye don't never say! Eh, the graceless creature

—after a' 'at ye've done, and been to him! My word, who could have believed such a thing! And ye've sairtain proof?"

"Only too sairtain—for so much; how much more I may have yet to discover. Look, see, look," taking some papers out of his pocket, "that's replies to two bills I sent in yesterday morning, that were as I thought long overdue: 'Mr. Esslemont, sir'" (he went on reading hastily), "'I am surprised you should have sent me a duplicate of your bill settled by me a *fortnight* ago—can produce discharged receipt for the same': and this, even stronger—'I have through some mistake, as I would suppose, received a second time your account for £15 10s. which I paid *yesterday* myself at your office, and enclose your clerk's receipt and stamp'—see here it is plain, 'J. R. *pro* Leslie Esslemont'—and no account whatever of these moneys in my books or a farthing of it forthcoming."

He was interrupted by a shrill cry from Katie, who had started up on her sofa. "Eh! Jeanie—Jeanie's dyin'! Dada! Grannie! see to her!"

For Jeanie, who had been listening to the conversation open-eyed and open-mouthed, as if turned to stone, had now quite collapsed in her chair, deadly pale and unconscious. Poor girl, she had indeed through the last few days been like the stag—

"he that tries to go on grazing

With the great deep gun-wound in his neck, then reels with sudden moan."

She had borne her own cruel wound, her lover's thoughtlessness, patiently and silently, also the worrying anxiety of the past two days; but the sudden revelation of her false lover's criminality and flight was too much, the strain could be borne no longer; and for the first time in her healthy young life she fell into a dead faint.

Grannie went to her assistance, while Leslie flew to comfort his terrified little daughter.

"She's only giddy, my pet—don't alarm yourself—she'll come to in a minute. See, ye'll hurt yourself, and there's no occasion."

"Is it because of Uncle Jock? Has Uncle Jock taken all your money, Dada?" were Katie's next rapid queries.

"Whisht, whishtye! No just that. Uncle Jock has been a bad boy, I doubt—but we don't just know all about it. Don't you heed, pettie."

"Is he away--where is he gone?"

"He's away for a bittie—and maybe he'll not be back for a while. Don't you speak about it, dear. Little wiesies like you doesna understand the like o' that. Ye know, ye must never turn over what ye hear us speak for ye. But don't alarm yourself. I'm no to do any to Uncle Jock. See, that's poor Jeanie comin' to."

Jeanie having been laid flat on the floor and abundantly dashed with cold water, by Aunt Annie, was beginning to respond to the treatment, with some hysterical gasps and sobs. When Leslie and his mother

had quietly placed her in the easy-chair, she said, looking up faint and bewildered :

“What is it? What has he done?”

“Don’t fret yersel’ the noo, poor lassie,” said Aunt Annie gently. “I doubt ye’ve been far too good to him this whilie, and I aye told ye he wasna desairvin’ ye should set your hairt upo’ him—but he’s pruvved it the noo, and he’s well away fro’ ye.”

“But what did Leslie say—it cannot be?” Jeanie said, in so distressed a tone that Grannie turned to her son. “See, Leslie, ye best tell her yerself, for she’ll no be satisfied. Do you speak to her.”

“Ay, Jeanie, my woman, I doubt it’s a bad business, but ye’ll be to hear it, so maybe it’s best at once. John’s away—and with what doesna belong to him. I’m thankful, any way, that things had gone no further between you two.”

Rather to Leslie’s surprise Jeanie raised her hands and eyes with a look of anguish, saying: “Eh! if I had only held him back—it’s my blame!”

“Jeanie! ye don’t ever tell me ye knew what he was to do?”

“He bid me promise not to speak of his affairs,” she murmured.

“Well! this beats a’ thing I ever knew!” Leslie exclaimed, drawing himself up from the position in which he had been bending over her. “To *you* to have seen the way we’ve been these two days past, and *known*, and never opened your lips! The scoundrel

ave worked upon ye till ye didna know right
ong.”

lie! don’t speak to me so!” cried Jeanie,
g herself up. “Of course I never knew what
d do. Ye don’t suppose he would tell me that.
ut his goin’ to America—I did know some word
—it was that, ye know, parted us—but I’d no
y to speak. But maybe if I hadna refused,
ldna have been.”

dear, I’m sorry I spoke rashly,” Leslie said,
her shoulder tenderly. “But could you know
I’ve been medd,* this while, and bothered and
—ye’d not wonder. Now that we’ve come to this,
—since what has been done surely releases ye
y promise of secrecy—I would really be very
bliged if ye could tell me anything ye do know,
v it stands with this fellow. I may say at once,
mean to prosecute him, on what I see. I’d not
nless I were actually obliged—for the sake of
t’s gone, and his own mother. But I would like
v anything that could account for this—and it
ny dear, you’re the only one ever was in his
nce, more’s the pity.”

ie sat up straight in the chair but did not
ately answer, and he added gently: “Or stay,
rather tell it to my mother, just yourselves?”

Jeanie stood up, quiet and collected. “I would
ell it to *you*, cousin. And if you please,” looking

* medd—put about, troubled.

round the room, "if we go some other way, I'll just tell you all. I think there's nothing I need seek to hide."

He took her by the hand and led her across the passage into the front kitchen; carefully seeing that the doors were closed. And there, with maidenly dignity and straightforward candour, without any false shame or equivocation, but with an almost pathetic simplicity, Jeanie told him—as she might have told her own father—the whole tale of her luckless courtship and engagement to John Robbie, and its termination.

Leslie listened to it all gravely and kindly, and when she had at length finished he said: "Well, my dear, it's a sad story, as it has proved. I know it cuts sore, when one that ye've trusted and loved goes wrong—and ye might judge that it comes hard upon me, that's so nearly connected with him, poor fellow! And yet I'm far more angry at him for the way he's treated you, than for the wrong done to myself. It's a heavy thought to me that this trouble should have come to ye under my roof—if we've had any hand in throwing you and him together. We're all poor erring short-sighted mortals, and 'deed I aye thought whenever I saw that he was ill about you, that it would surely be the saving of him, if you had come to like him; but we don't know how things will be!" and he sighed. "I did not think, let him be weak and thoughtless at a time, that poor Jock was bad at heart."

"I've thought since, maybe, if I had said I would

with him he would not have done the like of this," Jeanie said, sadly. "It's a sore heart to me."

"Nay, Jeanie, I don't think ye would need to vex yersel'. You were actin' accordin' to your duty: had ye done other it would have been like doin' evil that might come. And ye know, my dear, to say the best truth, I don't think Jock has been right this while—not settled in his own mind, nor happy; and ye had agreed to go, maybe it wouldn't have pleased ye long. No, Jeanie, ye may thank your good principle and good training, under Providence, that ye chose the right course, and were not led into more trouble through him." And then he added, "It's an awful thing for his mother, poor creature."

"Ay. And I think it'll be just fit to kill Agnes. She's so set upon him."

"Yes. Poor Agnes! Well, well—the Lord will may-bring him to repentance, before it be too late—we'll need to ask it of Him," Leslie said reverently. And now Jeanie, my dear, if there's anything we can do to make things easier for ye—would ye like home to see your mother at once, just!—and get entire change of air, and a while with her?"

"Thanks. I would like when Katie can want me."

"I doubt Katie's never very willin' to want ye," he said, with a little smile. "But she would need to learn that she must give way now and again to others."

"I don't like to leave her." And then Jeanie ventured to add: "They were speakin' of change to her—

would ye let her come home with me, to my mother's? and then we wouldn't need to part."

"I doubt she'd be too great a charge," Leslie said dubiously. "Ye know yerself she can't help herself at all, wi' yon weary knee."

"Eh, we would never think it a charge," Jeanie exclaimed. "I would never leave her; and mother and Lizzie would be so proud to notice her. I think she would like it, too, herself."

"Thank you, my dear. Well, we might think of it, by-and-by, if she grow any better, poor lamb. But in the meantime ye're no to be just sacrificed for her. I doubt we've let ye sacrifice yourself too much as it is."

"Not at all, Leslie. And for another thing—I don't think I would just care to go off home all at once, now, for this—to seem to *run away*, ye know."

"Ye wouldn't?" he said. "I see. Ye're a brave woman, Jeanie."

So Jeanie's confidence and their talk ended. But as she went back to the ordinary duties of life, she felt, amidst the abiding sense of disappointment, a certain comforting consciousness of Leslie's approval—"like when dear father was pleased with one"—she thought with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXII.

CRAIGENDYKES.

ONE bright day in early June, about three months after John Robbie's disappearance, saw Leslie Esslemont, with Katie and her devoted Jeanie, bestowing themselves in the train at Abermurchie *en route* for Jeanie's home.

For after all it was till then that Jeanie had had to wait for her long-expected home-going. It was a fortunate circumstance that she had been brave enough to be the first to face her life at the scene of her trial, rather than to fly from it and its associations. For when Katie's lingering indisposition came to a crisis at last in a sharp attack of measles : an attack which would have been a trial to a healthy child, but which for poor Katie, with her crippled frame and weakly constitution, was especially severe.

For some ten days theirs was a darkened household : every thought, word and action centred on the life-struggle of the little child, who was indeed the very light of her father's eyes. Dr. Spence said it was a

very critical case. But she struggled on through the epidemic, and out of it, by virtue of a certain underlying vitality inherited presumably from her father's vigorous constitution, which had given her, poor child, an increased capability of suffering. In a word, her time had not come, and she recovered.

Often through the illness, and still more trying tedious convalescence, Jeanie had cause for thankfulness that through her own disappointment she had been enabled to remain with her little cousin. Indeed it might have gone ill with Katie otherwise. Jeanie's hand and voice could always soothe her; and she nursed her throughout with as much assiduity and skill as if she had really been the professional nurse for whom Miss Spence once took her. Nor could Miss Spence be entirely kept away. She was profuse in offers to sit up at night; but these they managed to decline, with thanks. But she was in and out twenty times in the day, poor woman, with jelly, and fruit, and anything she could devise: repaid in some sort, when she had managed by skilful dodging to catch hold of the dear provost, and administer a little sympathizing squeeze of the hand, a tender pat on the arm—to whisper how completely she felt "with and for him." And if in a weak moment of intense anxiety or sheer fatigue poor Leslie was betrayed into a "thanks, ye're very good," or a half-unconscious responsive handshake, it was wonderful how much secret satisfaction Miss Spence managed to experience in the midst of her sorrowful sympathy.

"Dada" was of course the person who was desired to do most things by Katie, but he could not always be at hand, day as well as night. He found much demanding his attention at his place of business; and the further and deeper he went into his accounts, the more he was convinced that his late book-keeper's and clerk's aberrations had not begun only about the time of his flight; but that for a good while previously, during Leslie's absence from the office, Jock had been by divers petty dishonesties in his accounts, &c. trying to "feather his nest." These discoveries were by no means enlivening to poor Leslie, who had endeavoured all through his temporary disability to keep a supervision of affairs, but had also trusted, more than he was aware of, to his subordinate's integrity. Jeanie's heart used quite to ache for her big cousin on those sad evenings when he came home with such a grieved weary look upon his genial face—only to watch by the bedside of Katie, whom he seldom left at night when at the worst.

Their old clergyman and his wife were exceedingly kind and attentive during that time. Katie loved Mr. Fyffe, and his voice would soothe her sometimes even when delirious with her illness: as she grew better she looked forward with eager joy to his visits, which always seemed to bring comfort also to her father and Jeanie. Leslie confided most of his troubles to the good old pastor who had befriended him and his through many years; indeed Mr. Fyffe knew a good deal more of Leslie's inner self, his trials and fears, than most

people imagined : far more than any one else of his acquaintance. The quiet undemonstrative reserved and practical business man could unbosom himself with ease to the good old friend who, a son of the soil like himself, could yet by education and position, and still more in virtue of his office, aid and counsel him better than any other ; and Mr. Fyffe's aid and counsel, as well as warm-hearted sympathy, were never denied to any of his flock who sought them.

Mrs. Robbie did not come to the house during Katie's illness. She was afraid of taking "the merles" to Agnes. Jeanie had only seen Agnes once since Jock's departure. She had gone over from a sense of duty partly, to the lame girl : partly also from a secret craving to give and receive sympathy. But she was disappointed. Though she spoke no word of reproach, Agnes was stiff and reserved and changed : her manner chilled Jeanie and repelled her sympathy. Once, at that time, Jeanie had observed to Leslie that she feared Agnes was "not friends" with her ; and received for answer the somewhat dry remark that "she was always a curious creature, Agnes." As matters were, Jeanie could hardly regret her present enforced separation from her invalid friend.

When at length Katie had reached the convalescent stage of her illness, Dr. Spence said that a change of air was imperatively necessary : for she seemed after a time to make no progress, and to be pining away helplessly and causelessly, though the disorder was

duced. The only thing likely to restore appetite and strength was thorough change ; and no change could be better than Deeside, the country of Jeanie's home. There was no fear of carrying infection, as Jeanie's family had all had the measles before. It did not take long to arrange the preliminaries ; Margaret Ledingham was only too delighted to undertake the care of Katie, and as Jeanie was to be her inseparable companion, there seemed little risk in the experiment.

Of course Leslie would not trust his little invalid to travel alone ; so it was arranged that he was to go with them to Craigendykes, returning the next day.

Poor Katie began the journey in high spirits, but was very very weary when they at length arrived at the station, and she was transferred to the close fly which Leslie had requested his cousin to provide for her safe conveyance. Fortunately the drive from the station to the farm was a short one.

Craigendykes was a good-sized steading, with a northern aspect. It stood at the foot of a gently-rising hill, whose crown of pine-wood was an ample shelter to the north : to the south and west it had a glorious vista of blue Grampians, rising in multiform outline of ever-varying tint beyond a middle distance of richly-wooded and cultivated hill and valley.

There seemed quite a little crowd waiting to welcome the visitors at the farm-gate. Margaret Ledingham of course, in her best black dress and neat widow's cap ; on one side of her the young farmer Sandy, on the

other Lizzie, holding in check the two little boys. Peter, the second brother, was also there, having got a holiday from Friday to Monday, to meet Jeanie.

The mother's eye sought her child's face wistfully for a moment; and though there was no more demonstrative greeting between them at first than a hasty kiss, and a half-aside "Well, Jeanie" from Margaret as she held out her arms for the little invalid, the look and the tone were worth volumes of endearing words. Margaret carried Katie straight into the house, while Leslie dismissed the fly; her three younger children surrounding her with exclamations of "eh, the little darlin'ie!" "eh, the poor lammie!" and so forth. "Keep out over, bairns," their mother said. "She's awfu' wearied-kind, and she's nae accustomed wi' numbers. Hist ye, Lizzie, and fetch a cup of the new-milked milk to her—or is it tea that she gets, Jeanie? for I'se wager she's needin' a drink. Ye'll sit upon my knee and take it, pettie, won't ye?" And by the time her father came in, Katie was sitting quite at her ease on Cousin Margaret's motherly lap, sipping her "new-milked milk" in tranquil contentment, while a circle of admiring cousins looked on: Jemmie, who was her own age, regarding her shyly, with his fingers in his mouth, as some natural curiosity, while little Leslie toddled up and with great good-will and self-abnegation proffered her a half-eaten apple.

Jeanie's first care was to get her off to bed at once, in which her mother fully concurred. Margaret was put

some shifts to accommodate all her guests, but had stted to Katie the best spare room, on the ground r—possessing a pretty white-curtained bed, and tly-appointed toilet-table and various little luxuries l decorations—of course to be shared by Jeanie.

‘I think I’ll like Deeside,” Katie said rather con-cendingly, when her father went to give her his d-night kiss. “Cousin Margaret’s terrible nice, and Lizzie and the boys. And Sandy says they’ve got ht young calfies, and over forty chickenies, and two lies—a blue and a chestnut—and he’ll take me to them all the morn’s mornin’. Only *think*, Dada!”

‘That will be a right diversion to ye, my pet. And v ye must go and sleep, and we’ll see if Deeside will some roses into those wee white cheekies of yours!’ ‘What do ye think of her, Margaret?’ was Leslie’s t anxious question of his old friend and cousin, first moment he could get her a little aside to self.

‘Well, Leslie, I’ll not flatter ye but I think she looks a deylicat.”

‘How long is’t since ye saw her? I don’t mind.”

‘Atween five and six years. Just after she first w unwell.”

‘And is she better or worse lookin’ than when ye r her last?’

‘Deed, I could hardly say, Leslie. It’s scarce a fair lgment either, and her only new out of this sickness.”

‘The measles has taken her down dreadful,” he

admitted. "She wasn't much to look at before, but she's just away to nothing now. Sometimes I think," he added, lower, "though I haven't allowed myself think it before—but now and again of late when I've looked at her I've thought maybe—I'll not see her grow up."

Margaret was silent. Very few except poor Leslie cherished the hope that Katie would grow up.

"What do ye say, Margaret?" he asked, wistfully, "for I have a great idea of your opinion. I don't know any I'd as soon take."

Margaret turned her gentle sensible face towards her cousin. "It's scarcely fair to ask me, Leslie, when I've only just seen her, and her newly better o' the merles—besides that she's weary the night, I can see. I'll be better able to judge after a few days, what I think. And I've great faith in the change, and this air, for any that's unwell. Anyway, we'll do our very utmost for her: and I'm real proud ye can trust's wi' the charge of her."

"I don't know who I'd trust if not you, Margaret. And I can't say too much of your Jeanie. I could never say what she's been to us, through Katie's illness, and all. She's quite devoted to the child, and Katie's that fond of her, grown—it's well our doctor allowed Katie's comin' here, for I doubt Jeanie wouldn't have won home else!" he ended with a little laugh.

"I'm real pleased she's been useful," said the mother with a quiet smile of satisfaction. "She's a good

s, Jeanie, I must allow, and always been. They're good children to me, Leslie—I wish I may be thankful."

"Ay; ye've reason to be. Peter's a fine lad, growin'. What are ye to make him?"

"Deed, Leslie, I hardly know. He's doin' well enough with the merchan' at Stralogie—he's capital at figures, 'a' that—but would ye believe, his head's that teen up 'athletic sports, I'm almost feared he'll never settle dady to business. And yet the lad's nae idle, nor yet d; and I'm not willin' to be too hard on him, or forbid m to compete."

"So as he doesna get in with bad company," Leslie d. "It's fine recreation for an active lad—forbye the zes he wins. I would like a talk with the boy some ie."

'I would be real glad you should speak to him, lie," Margaret said. "It's a great thought to me en, that there they are, wantin' a father's hand over m, and only just their right principle, and their e for myself and home, to keep them within bounds. t I do thank God for it wi' a' my hairt, Leslie, there's one o' them has ever been known to drink, nor is re a word said against their conduct in any one way unless that poor Patie's too fond of seekin' a holiday en there's games goin'," she ended, with a smile. ut I do think the laddie's hairt is in the right place." There was a very affecting parting between the father d daughter next day. I know not how many in-

structions Jeanie received to take good care of Katie, and to remember this, that, and the other: to be sure and write him word how she was keeping, and to wire at once if there was any back-turn. Katie was sufficiently rested and better next morning for Leslie to leave her pretty comfortably; but when it came to the actual good-bye she began to whimper and cling to him; whereat he stood helplessly, and would have lost his train altogether if Margaret had not made a diversion by carrying her to the door to give a "piece" to Bessie the mare waiting in the gig. Peter was to drive his cousin to the station; and Margaret hoped they would have their "talk" on the way. She had unbounded faith in Leslie's influence and opinions.

That day was Saturday. In the evening they expected Helen, who was coming home for a short holiday also. She had asked her uncle and aunt to let her have her holiday thus early, to suit Jeanie's time, she said. But in reality there were other reasons why it was more agreeable for Helen to have her holiday then. June was a dull month on the moors; but by July or August the Strathkessachie party were in full force, and had their house full of visitors. And though she never spoke of it, and scarcely admitted it to herself, the time for autumn guests at Strathkessachie was that to which she had looked forward during all the dreary autumn and winter and spring at the manse—nay, the one thing which had made her content to remain at the manse so long at all. Rather, I should say, it was the

possibility of the return of one of the last year's guests, whose image was never very far from Helen Ledingham's thoughts.

Helen came by the evening train, and was fetched up in the gig by Sandy. She was looking well on the whole, and in good spirits; but to Jeanie's feeling there was still that indefinable though very appreciable difference about her which Jeanie had observed in the winter. Jeanie much wondered whether her mother noticed it: also, being enlightened by her own experience, she wondered whether her sister had any heart-trial, any love-secret of her own, which made her at times so pensive and silent, so lofty and reserved. Jeanie herself had at last accomplished a confidential talk with her mother, which comforted her greatly. Of course Margaret had known all the circumstances of Jeanie's unhappy engagement, and its termination; but Jeanie was able in confidential conversation to unburden her mind in many little ways to her mother, which could not be done in writing; and it was infinite consolation to be assured that she had acted in her trying circumstances exactly as her mother would have wished her to do.

It was a happy party, on the whole, that sat round the farm-house tea-table that Saturday night. Katie had brightened up a good deal in the afternoon, and was beginning to take a lively interest in her new surroundings.

"I hope it 'll be a fine day the morn," Sandy observed

during the meal. "Ye'll need all to turn out in your best braws to hear the new minister."

"The new minister!" said Helen and Jeanie in a breath.

"Eh, yes. I was near forgettin' it was the new minister," said their mother. "Ye ken, sin' Mr. MacIver went away in Februar', we've had no regular minister, but just one comin' and anither comin' as they could be spared—and whiles no service at a'. But there's a settled minister come now—'least I hear he's come—and he preaches to-morrow."

"Where's he fro'?" asked Peter, "and what's his name?"

"What was it again?" said Margaret considering. "I think it's Melrose—Mr. Melrose. I don't rightly know where he's frae, only that he's English, and just new ordained. But I haird that the Beeshop should say, hoo that he would send some other, ilka month, to take Communion Sunday, or else come himsel', ye know—though it mightn't aye be *first* Sunday i' the month."

"Will Katie go to the church?" asked Lizzie.

"Not the morn, I doubt," said Jeanie, looking at her mother. "She hasn't been at home since she was unwell. And it's a step further here."

"Then I'll stop with her," cried Lizzie in great glee. "It's me that stops with baby the forenoon. Ye'll like to stop with me, won't ye, pettie? and little Leslie and we'll hold a right time."

"Yes, I'll stop with you," said Katie. "But you must read me the chapters, ye know, and the singing—Dada always does."

"The singin'?" said Lizzie, puzzled.

"She means the day's Psalms," said Jeanie. "They're always sung at Mr. Fyffe's chapel."

"She's a good little wifie, to mind," said Margaret, who sat next her, giving her a kiss. "I'm sure she's a right pattren to ye all to mind upo' good things!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. MELROSE.

THE June sun had been up and shining many hours before the stir of life began even upon Craigendykes farm.

"I'm glad it's a fine day, for ye to go and hear the new minister," said Katie, as Jeanie was brushing out the child's soft hair before putting on her Sunday dress; "and I *hope* it's fine over at home, for poor old Dada and Grannie. Won't it be strange to them to go to the church their lone the day?"

"Why, Katie, they often go themselves alone when we're there."

"Yes, I know. But not to have me and you, it must seem so curious-like. I wish poor old Dada could have stopped, for I don't like him to want me upon Sunday. I wish I was able to go wi' you, Jeanie," with a little sigh.

"Do you think ye'll be able to let me?" asked Jeanie, "because ye know I'm quite happy to stop, if ye like."

"Oh no, ye can go, Jeanie. I'll do fine with Lizzie, d I *do* love baby Leslie! And Lizzie says she'll take t some pillows and plaids and let us sit outside, der the ash-tree, and we'll watch ye goin' and comin'. it I would like that I was able to go with ye: though must be terrible dull if they've no singin' boys, and st *reads* the chantin'!"

And then as Jeanie finished binding a dark blue bon round Katie's sunny hair, she added "Ye'll t on Dada's frock the day, wont ye, when it's such a od day—ye'll no get it tashed?" (soiled).

"Yes, I was meaning to wear it," said Jeanie.

Helen's first thought, when she woke and saw the ight morning, was one of satisfaction that she was not have the long tramp to the chapel at Whinnymuir.

"What shall I wear for church?" she asked herself, she looked over the few dresses she had brought. Not this," as a certain white *pique*, with creamy lace, as turned over; "it would be the most comfortable rtainly—but too remarkable, beside my mother's acks—and I'm so tall, it makes such a mass of white— wonder what Jeanie's to put on; she's always rather owdy—well, I suppose I'd better try my old black silk, ere won't likely be many that knows me to-day.

"I wonder what like the new minister is!" her oughs went on. "Young, and English, and just dained—some boy, I would suppose, new from the niversity and knowing no more about our church than a infant. I think it's really hard they can't give us a

right clergyman, after a man like Mr. MacIver. My mother doesn't care for these young ministers, I know. I wonder if *he's* ordained yet, poor fellow! or when—*heigho!*” and with a long sigh Helen proceeded with her toilette.

She looked quiet and ladylike and suitably dressed, of course, in the black silk (which had been turned): she always did. But when they met at the breakfast-table there was little Jeanie (who was always dowdy!) transmogrified, though not unbecomingly, in the neatest, trimmest slate-grey silk, evidently just turned out by the dressmaker, and fitting her tidy figure to perfection.

“Where has the child got that?” thought the elder sister. “She that never cared to spend upon her dress! I'll find out all about it though.”

“Yon's a real pretty frock,” she began, the first opportunity that offered.

“I'm glad ye like it,” said Jeanie. “It's the first time I've put it on.”

“And it's a good silk. It'll have been expensive.”

“I don't know what it cost,” said Jeanie, smiling demurely.

“Why, child, ye've not been running up bills and not asking what they come to?” cried Helen, taking the admonitory tone she liked to assume with her younger sisters. “That's not your usual.”

“No,” said Jeanie. “It was a present.”

“Indeed! not from old Aunt Peter?”

“No. Leslie gave it to me, after Katie grew better.

He said he would like to make me some little present, just to show his sense of my attention to her—not that he was seekin' any, I'm sure! but he said he thought perhaps the most useful thing for me in the meantime would be a Sunday dress, as I hadn't bought a new one since we put off our mournin's—and so he chose this for myself, and gave it me, the makin' and all. I'm glad to like it."

"I think he shows real good taste," said Helen: inwardly thinking that it would be long before Uncle George would give *her* such a present.

The country was looking very fair in its early summer dress when the church-going party, after seeing Lizzie, Katie, and baby Leslie comfortably settled under the yew-ash with their books, walked down the hill to the little chapel which stood at its foot. To Jeanie the sight of her native valley, with the Sabbath-day stillness there is actually no better word—resting upon the familiar scenes; the broad cornfields, their light-green glowing ever lighter towards harvest-gold; the quiet farms around with the restful hush upon them, the children sitting at the cottage-doors, the cart-horses standing lazily in the sheltered nooks, the large herds feeding on the open moss, with its attendant herddie; the neatly-dressed groups of friends and neighbours trooping to the different churches: these and a hundred more common everyday sights, but framed and set in their glorious surrounding of richly-clothed river-bank and purple heather land: to Jeanie, after her

long absence, and residence in a town, and in a agricultural district, were fraught with a most soothing and refreshing influence. The return to her place, the society of her nearest and dearest friends, and not least perhaps Katie's convalescence; the consciousness that in her late trials she had endeavored to do her duty and to choose the right if not the easiest course, all combined to make little Jeanie calmer and lighter of heart than she had been for months. Of course there was always the one all-pervading heart-sorrow, the grief for the falling away of one so dear, the anxious uncertainty as to his fate—for John Robbie's disappearance no tidings of him who had reached Abermurchie. But the love and sorrow which had changed Jeanie Ledingham from a girl to a woman had happily for her left unaltered the childlike faith which could leave its unsolved doubts to the Higher Wisdom, its loving cares to the Heavenly Love which is able to seek out and save the erring. Therefore her peace of mind could not be easily shaken, her gentle evenness of spirits entirely unshaken. And thus it was in a frame of mind of chastened and real happiness that she walked down to the church beside her mother, holding little Jemmie's hand on the other side: while Sandy walked on his mother's side, and Helen and Peter paired off together.

The Craigendykes party filled their seat well to overflowing. They were in good time; and there was a full, respectable congregation, all awaiting with some cur-

the appearance of their new pastor. So they sat, perhaps a little longer than usual, while the single bell clang-clanged vigorously : then it ceased, and the young lady who sat at the harmonium began with her voluntary, till after a short interval the vestry-door opened and the clergyman came in—a strong straight-forward-looking honest young Englishman, with the deacon's stole over one broad shoulder—and walked into his reading-desk. But to one in the congregation the notes of the harmonium became a confused bray, and the church seemed suddenly, though for a moment only, to turn round before her eyes : for above the cassock and surplice were the honest sun-tanned features, and the light hair and moustache, and the kindly blue eyes of Horace Penreath.

Yes, it was his very self—none other. And he did not look so very unclerical, or unhappy either. Perhaps the sacred calling undertaken so dutifully and obediently, though not from the highest motives, was bringing its own blessing with it, and the fuller love and devotion would be yet awakened by-and-by. I suppose no one will be very hard on poor Helen for not having much thought for the service in which she was joining outwardly. The surprise was too great, too sudden for her to be conscious of anything but that it was he himself, and that his voice was reading the words, just the very same quiet kindly voice whose tones she remembered so well. To his face, after that first glance, she scarcely dared raise her eyes : not even when he

went into the pulpit and gave out the text of his sermon. It was a very plain, ordinary sermon on the day's gospel: it might have been a schoolboy's exercise: there were old farmers with shrewd critical eyes, ready to cut up and depreciate the poor young fellow's well-meaning and painstaking and innocent composition. But to this one hearer there was something intensely touching in its very simplicity and ordinariness; and certainly she had never listened with more rapt attention to the utterances of the most eloquent preacher under whom she had ever sat.

When at length the sermon—and it was by no means a long one—was over, Helen followed her mother out of church as if in a dream. There were various old acquaintances in the churchyard, but she could scarcely have told who they were; and she heard divers remarks from the groups they passed, as “Hoo d’ye like him?” “nae gryte things at a sairmon,” “some new to his wark,” etc. etc. But Margaret Ledingham did not care for stopping to talk on coming out of church, so she moved quietly on with gentle passing salutations, surrounded by her children. When they had reached the road, Helen drew up to her mother’s side, saying quietly, but in a voice which to herself sounded strangely forced: “Mother, the clergyman’s name is not Melrose, at all. It is Penreath.”

“Penreath! yon’s a curious name. I wonder who could have given me Melrose—or Penrose possibly it may have been. When did ye hear, Nellie?”

"I didn't hear. I knew him last year at Kessachie. He's a nephew of Mrs. Leslie."

"He is? Just fancy that. Did ever ye hear him preach, than?"

"Oh no. He was not ordained last year."

"Well, I didna think very much o' him—let him be underneath or Penrose or what no," said Sandy. "A very poor sairmon."

"Hoots! sairmon! I'd preach as good a sairmon myself," said Peter.

"Did you like him, mother?" said Helen, not condescending to notice her brothers' opinions.

"Well, I couldn't just exactly say; he's no just very airy-lookin', but his sairmon was no bad, so much the delivery, I think—it made me mind, someway, on a schoolboy readin' over his lesson. But he's aybe strange-like yet, poor fella: and I doubt he is some bashfu'. I'd rather see that than a young man terrible forward and pleased wi' himsel' at the very first."

"He's no like Mr. Fyffe, Abermurchie," said Jeanie. "I wish you could hear some of *his* sairmons, mother."

"Ay, I know. He's a teirrible nice man, Mr. Fyffe. He haired him years ago. I doubt ye'll no find mony like him."

"That's a gey muscular chappie whatever that they've sent us—I wouldn't mind givin' him a fall," said Peter the athlete.

"Hoots, Patie!" And then, turning to Helen, her

mother added: "Div ye know him pairsonally, then, Nellie? Is he a pleasant-like gentleman to speak to?"

"Very pleasant," said Helen shortly.

"Ye've not given us your opeenion o' him in the pu'pit, Nell," said Sandy. "I think we've had every other body's."

"Ye've had opinions enough wanting mine," she answered stiffly. "I'm not just a great critic of sairmons, though I know what pleases myself."

And not a word more would Helen vouchsafe; and her brothers knew it when she spoke in that tone, also that she was not best pleased. They seldom, if ever, ventured further with her. Jeanie they might tease and banter, at a time; but Helen never.

It was dinner-time when they went home. And after dinner they dispersed in groups or singly: Sandy and Peter to inspect the beasts, and the former to attend to necessary duties: Margaret to the household offices which fell upon her: Lizzie with the children: Jeanie to her peculiar charge. Helen was with none of these. She went up-stairs, to her own room, and sat down—to think. What a relief it was to get away by herself, away from the ordinary talk, the futile remarks of her brothers, their careless canvassing of the new minister's merits and demerits! What were they but a couple of foolish impertinent boys, venturing to criticize their better—nay more, the pastor who had been set over them?—a *gentleman*, thought Helen indignantly, to the very core, as much superior to them as—oh! it was

horrible! She wanted to sit quiet, to remember what he had said; to realize that this was the very Horace Penreath who had helped her in her fear of the bull, and been so kind to her on the night of the dance—who would not let her walk back alone—yes, and she felt had given her some of his confidence too. *She* knew all about him, why he was there, as a minister, at all; and she honoured him all the more for his self-denial. And then she fell to thinking over the curious chance which had brought them together again. She was a romantic young woman at heart, Miss Helen, for all her demureness and diligence. She loved a novel, of a sensational and romantic character, in the intervals of algebra and analysis; and she was fond of imagining romantic situations. It was almost like a novel that she and Mr. Penreath should have met now in this unexpected, unpremeditated way. And Helen was fain, though unconsciously, to lay the flattering unction to her soul that there was something *in* it—how, she would have found it difficult to explain. She would have given up her situation and her prospects readily if by accepting an engagement elsewhere she would be thrown into his neighbourhood; but as that did not seem likely, she had remained patiently in her uncongenial life at the manse, in the hope that autumn days and grouse would bring him back to her again. And now here, at home, the accidental time of her holiday had brought her face to face with him in his new sphere of duty; and he was settled for the present at least in her mother's

neighbourhood. It was strange, it was marvellous no doubt; and Helen excused herself for looking on it as a happy omen. Poor Helen!

Perhaps some may be inclined to wonder at her presumption. But she was very young, after all,—only one-and-twenty; and she lived a hard distasteful unsatisfying life, and had a restless aspiring mind, to begin with. She had not indeed realized at first how seriously her heart's feelings had become involved when she allowed her thoughts to dwell on this hero who had come into her prosaic life. The discovery of her hero's destiny, too, had seemed to make him less utterly beyond her reach. Had he been a soldier or a sailor, a London barrister or a country squire's son with "expectations," there might have been more discrepancy in thinking of herself and him together. But a "minister"—there was something homely in the name: something taking to her who had always been, outwardly at least, an obedient daughter of the Church. In her native country, too, the Presbyterian, nay, also the Episcopal clergy are often men who have risen from the ranks by their own abilities and good education, and whose wives and sisters and connections, male and female, may belong to even a humbler class than did this daughter of a Deeside farmer. And Helen possessed, and was modestly conscious that she possessed, advantages of person, intellect and training, which no gentleman need despise.

It was not usual for the Craigendykes party to attend

he evening service (which was at six o'clock in summer) unless any of the heads of the family had been kept at home in the forenoon. It was nearly half an hour's walk, down the hill and up again; besides that Scotch country folks, even when Episcopalians, are generally contented with one service on a Sunday. But this evening, soon after five, Helen, who had for some time been absent from the rest of the party, met her sister Lizzie with the question, "Would ye like to come with me to evening service, dear, as you were not out this morning?"

Lizzie jumped up in delight. "Mother, Nellie says he'll walk with me to the church to-night, if you can want me."

"Will ye no be tired, Nellie?" said Margaret.

"Oh no, I am used to a far longer walk every Sunday at Kessachie."

"Well, just as ye like; I don't think either of the boys is goin', but ye'll no be terrible late back whatever, if he disna gie ye a longer preachin' than this mornin's."

"I would like to come with ye too, Nellie," said Jeanie, coming forward, "as Katie has plenty of company. I wouldn't have minded so much," she added in a lower tone to her sister, "but I wished so much to look at dear father's headstone—ye know I've never been here since it was erected, and I didn't like to stop after mother this forenoon."

"Of course, come if you please," said Helen. "It'll

be a small enough congregation no doubt, supposin' we were all to go again."

So the three sisters set off together down the hill. The evening was if possible more lovely than the forenoon had been; the air soft and cool and refreshing after the day's heat, as they strolled leisurely down.

"It's not often I get the opportunity of goin' twice a day to the church," said Helen. "I suppose you do, Jeanie, being in town."

"Well, now and again I do. But there's always one of us must stop, ye know, with Katie, when she's not able to go." And Jeanie sighed to herself. She used to be so happy once, poor girl, when her turn was in the evening, and Jock used to meet her at the street corner and go with her. She had such happy thoughts, such innocent peaceful anticipations about him then—and now—oh! where was poor Jock now, and into what worse evil might he not have fallen! With all her faith those thoughts would come over her now and then with an almost overwhelming sense of sadness and hopelessness; and she felt as if it would indeed be a comfort to kneel down in the quiet little church again, and cover her face and say her prayer for him.

The congregation was certainly a very small one that evening; and poor Horace looked rather forlorn when he got into the reading-desk and faced the little handful gathered to meet him. He had been taking a long hard walk, for something to do, between services, and had mistimed himself, and hurried back; and he

looked more red and brown than ever, and came in with the perspiration on his brow and the dust on his boots. And when it came to the sermon, it seemed as if the fewness of his auditors depressed him; so he read it if possible less impressively than in the morning. The service altogether scarcely lasted an hour; and when they came out the three sisters turned to the quiet corner of the little graveyard where their mother was laid, while Jeanie carefully coned the inscription on the new stone. Helen felt a little impatient of Jeanie's lingering. She would have given anything to meet Horace; still she shrank above all things from the idea of seeming to try and meet him. That gravestone would look so like an excuse; and it was Jeanie who lingered there, not she.

However, when poor little Jeanie had satisfied her longing memories, and they turned out of the churchyard, there in the road was the young parson, just going in the opposite direction to theirs. He saw her immediately, took off his hat to her, and then shook hands. Helen made a slight murmur of "my dear," upon which he similarly saluted Jeanie and her sister.

"I didn't know you lived here, Miss Ledingham. I thought I saw you in church this morning—with your mother, was it?"

"Yes. This is my home—but I am only here for a day just now."

"I hope to come and call on Mrs Ledingham."

Whereabouts does she live? for I am quite a stranger here."

"The second farm—when ye get quite to the top of the hill. It is just a little bit off the road."

"Thank you. I hope perhaps you—or she—will be able to tell me something about the people, and whom I ought to go and call on, for I haven't the slightest idea! I know nothing whatever about my parishioners—and I'm told all the village people are Presbyterians," he ended with a sort of look of despair that was almost comic.

"My mother will be very pleased to see you," Helen said. She had recovered her self-possession somewhat, he was so easy and frank and like his old self. "I hope Miss Penreath is quite well. Is she with you?"

"No, no; I'm quite alone at present. My sister is quite well, thank you; good evening." He raised his hat and walked on. "He seems good-natured, like, the minister, to speak to," said Lizzie, who was the first to make a remark.

"Yes, I rather like his appearance," said Jeanie. "I'm glad you know him, Nellie, it's so much pleasanter for mother and all, by what an entire stranger coming would be. Ye like him, don't ye?"

A faint smile played over Helen's face for a moment. "I always thought him agreeable. And since I have known more about him I have such a respect for him—one couldn't do other."

"Then do ye know much about him?"

"Yes; a good deal." Helen felt as if she must speak now; it was a relief to her. "His father is a clergyman, and he's an only son. And his father was quite set upon his entering the ministry. He didn't just care very much about it himself, he loves sport and all that kind of thing, ye know; but he was *so good* that he gave in, to please his father."

"But I doubt he wouldn't make just a very right minister, that way," said Jeanie. "I mind once we were speaking of something o' the kind, over at Abernethie, and Leslie sayin' if a man hadn't a right call to the ministry, he never made much of it, and what a shame it was to any to force a man into such a position against his wish."

"Oh yes, that may be very true. I don't suppose it was so bad as all that though with Mr. Penreath, only that he just gave up his own pleasure to his father's wish. And I think ye would know—ye would see in his face" (Helen's vernacular came out strong in her enthusiasm) "how airnestly he was set to try and do his duty. I've a very great respect for him, Jeanie, as I said; and I don't like to hear those foolish lads cuttin' their jokes and cryin' him down, when he's as far as superior as they can think!" She finished so animatedly that Jeanie glanced up to her sister's face a moment almost in surprise, then cast down her eyes and blushed, but Helen did not.

The rest of their walk was pursued somewhat silently;

and they reached the farm at about a quarter to eight, for they had come slowly up the hill.

"I'm glad you're back to me, Jeanie," said little Katie, when Jeanie was putting her to bed.

"I hope ye've not required me, dear," Jeanie said. "It was real good of ye to let me out twice."

"Oh! no. I've been very happy, *all* day, 'less when I was thinkin' of Dada, and him being without me. I don't like thinkin' of Dada being without me, ye know." It was strange, but poor little Katie's feeling seemed rather for her father than for herself in their separation.

"He'll be pleased to know so happy as ye are," Jeanie said. "I told ye ye would like my mother and my sister."

"Yes, I do. I think Lizzie's some like yourself. And I like Sandy and Patie—Sandy carries me so easy, like poor old Dada almost. I like them *all*—but oh, Jeaniekie!"—with such a squeeze of her little thin arms round Jeanie's neck—"I'll never *never* like anybody as well as yourself!"

"My own lammie," said Jeanie, returning the embrace warmly; and tears rose to her eyes, so very precious and touching to her was the affection of this little child, without whom even the enjoyment of her first peaceful Sunday at home would hardly have been complete.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEW MINISTER'S DOGGIE.

AFTER that first day, the life at the farm flowed on very smoothly and quietly.

Katie certainly seemed to improve with the change. She ate more and slept better; she seemed to suffer less from the cold air, and greatly enjoyed being taken out of doors, and seeing the various works that went on. Sandy used to carry her around the byres and stables till she knew every individual "coo" and "beast," and loved to pat their sleek hides; also to assist at the "meating" of the chickens, to watch the ducks on the pond, and the queer grotesque turkeys strutting about the barnyards. She made good friends too with Sharp, the collie, which was a young dog, and loved a romp with the children. And though she was still precluded by the "weary weather" from attempting to walk, the weather was so mild and dry that she was able to spend great part of her time in the open air.

Her cousins were all devoted to her. Her pretty face and caressing ways, her clever little fingers and funny

old-fashioned sayings, her delicacy and helplessness, but most of all the sweet temper and touching patience with which she bore her trials, won the hearts of all, from farmer Sandy to four-year-old Leslie: nor were the farm-servants behind in their attention to her. Sammy Merchant, the first horseman, in particular, was always delighted to carry her when Sandy was not in the way, and to show her his particular charge, the two young foals, which were her great delight; nay, he had once given her a five minutes' ride on Bonnie Maggie, his favourite cart-mare, whose broad soft back was a luxurious seat even without a cushion. So taking all things into consideration it was not wonderful that she improved in health, and that Jeanie's first bulletin to "poor old Dada" was such as to cause him great satisfaction.

I am bound to say that on the Monday after that first Sunday, Helen rose with her head full of one subject only, namely, the new minister's promised call upon her mother. Of course he would come that day; so Helen took care to be early 'dressed for company, and was quite in a fidget that her sisters should also present a respectable appearance, and the parlour be in applepie order. Monday, however, passed, and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday—and he came not. And with each day's delay Helen grew more and more nervously expectant. She would not go far from the house on any account: she could not occupy herself: she sat constantly dreaming, absent, silent. Piano there

as none, as since her father's death and her own departure from home the instrument which he had red for her benefit had been returned; so she could t keep herself quiet with practising. Margaret and anie both observed that she seemed ill at ease: the othor began to fear that she had been overwork- g herself, but in truth Helen's studies had been very fully pursued of late.

At length on Friday afternoon, as Margaret was busy amongst the fowls, Helen came up to her with rather perturbed countenance. "Mother, that's Mr. Penreath e clergyman, coming up the road. I thought he ould surely have called for you before this. You'll me in, won't ye, at once? and do let me take that ron," as Margaret lifted out therefrom two delicate icks and placed them in the coop.

"Thank ye, my dear, yes—I'll go for my best cap, d then I think I'll do. You're always neat. Is any e in the parlour?"

"Yes, Katie's there—it's rather a bother—and Jeanie. bid Lizzie wait upon the door."

And as Mrs. Ledingham vanished in search of her nday cap, Helen, smoothing down her dark hair me- anically, walked through the passage, and passing the out door, saw the parson in the act of being admitted Lizzie with a smiling and blushing countenance.

Helen stepped forward to receive him. "Come in, ease. My mother will be here immediately. Will u take a chair?"

"Thanks. I *have* come to the right place, I see. I was awfully afraid I had made a mistake when I didn't see any one I knew, and was wondering what on earth I should say for myself. How do you do?" to Jeanie, and then turning to little Katie: "Is this another sister?"

"No, a little cousin, staying with us for change; she has been very unwell."

"Tell the minister your name, pettie," said Jeanie, in a low voice.

"Kate Robbie Esslemont," said the child, looking up fearlessly, as she always did, but fixing her eyes for a minute on Horace's kindly face as if she were attracted by it, with a look that went straight to his heart. Perhaps it was easier for him to speak to her just then than to make talk to the young ladies; for he said good-naturedly: "Yes? And how old are you, eh? And do you come to my church too?"

"I'm eleven and a half years of age," answered Katie, "and I belong to Mr. Fyffe Abermurchie's church; but I can't go just now 'cause I'm lame, and can't walk any."

"No? that's a bad business," he said looking down upon her kindly, "but you must look sharp and get well. How jolly this side of the country is," he added, turning to Helen. "It's much prettier than about Strathkessachie—and yet I must say I do like those moors."

Just then the door opened, admitting Margaret

ingham, who had tidied herself up to greet her new
or : admitting also, with a little patter and scuffle,
ond visitor—a small wire-haired prick-eared yellow
er, who came rummaging and sniffing about in
sh of its master. Katie greeted it with a delighted
“Eh ! the bonnie doggie !”

Oh, I say,” Horace began, “this is too bad ! You’ve
usiness here, Nellie—Nellie, go out, I say !”

Eh ! dinna put out the doggie !” pleaded Katie ;
Mrs. Ledingham seconded her, saying, “It winna do
ill, poor creature.”

May she stay, Mrs. Ledingham ? she’s very well-
aved usually, but I told her to wait outside. Come
3, Nell, lie down. A Strathkessachie pup, Miss
ingham,” he added, turning to Helen. “They gave
to me last year when I went south, to console me.”

Now it is difficult to see why the mention of a
athkessachie pup should cause Miss Ledingham to
sh so hotly as she did, till she was obliged to bend
n, under the pretence of picking something up, to
e it. But she had caught the dog’s name. If she
l only known that Nell was a standing name for
riers in the Strathkessachie kennel, handed down
m generation to generation, perhaps it might have
ed her confusion : but she did not, you see. In the
antime Margaret was setting on the table various
ies and cates for the guest ; pressing upon him also,
ording to hospitable custom, wine or spirits, which
ter however he begged to be excused taking, saying

he would much rather have a drink of milk, if she didn't mind; and when she was gone to fetch it, he appealed to Helen with rather a comic air of deprecation. "By-the-bye, oughtn't I to drink your mother's health? They used to do something of the sort at the Strathkessachie farms. Will she think me very rude? I do so dislike whiskey—I suppose it wouldn't be correct to drink it in milk?"

Neither Jeanie nor Helen could help laughing. "I hope your mother won't be offended—it would be dreadful if I put my foot in it the first day I called!"

"There's no fear of my mother," said Helen, still laughing. "I think she'll rather be pleased at you seeking the milk."

"How are Mr. and Mrs. Argo, by the way?" he next asked. "Do you stay there still?"

"They are very well, thank you. Yes; I am still there in the meantime."

"My uncle is come down, I hear."

"Yes. The family has been there some time, but I think they have no company at present. Will you be down by-and-by, Mr. Penreath?" (rather diffidently).

"Yes—I—a—I rather think so." And as he said this, Horace looked down and pulled the dog's ears as it lay between his feet; and Helen even fancied that his face became a little redder. But it would have needed a nice discrimination to observe this, considering its normal tint.

Mrs. Ledingham here put down the milk, to which the visitor did as much justice as any schoolboy.

"Come here, Nell," he said presently to the dog, which had grown animated at symptoms of eating. "Since you have intruded yourself into Mrs. Ledingham's room, you may as well be agreeable! Sit up."

And Nell did as she was told at once; further she went through the performances of "trust" and "paid" with exemplary exactness, Katie watching in a perfect quiver of delight. "Eh! the darlin' doggie! would like a doggie like yon for my own."

"You'd like to keep her, eh?" said her master. "Ah, but I'm afraid she'd not stay. She makes an awful row when she's away from me—and I have to put her up so carefully at church time. But I will bring her to see you again sometimes if your mother—Mrs. Ledingham has no objection."

"Ye're very good, Mr. Penrose" ("Oh! stupid other, can't you give him his right name?" thought Ellen); "it's a real divairt to the like of her to see anything new; she's a sad sufferer, poor lammie, and never like to be but an objec'," said Margaret, while Katie listened with perfect equanimity. She had heard the same from Grannie Robbie, times without number.

"Well, I think I must be off," Horace said, after a little more insignificant conversation with Mrs. Ledingham, in which he had managed to discover the names and localities of some of his new flock, and thought at a thorough lady the farmer's widow was, in spite

of her homely tongue and simple ways. And as he bent down to shake hands with Katie, she looked up eagerly. "Please will ye bring the doggie soon, sir?"

"I'll see about it," he said good-naturedly, and the rest of the party escorted him to the door. "Now let me see. I must go as far as the next turning and then across the moss and over some fields, to reach Knockendryne, is that it? I don't think I ought to lose my way. Thanks, Mrs. Ledingham, good-bye! Come to heel, Nell."

And away he walked. Katie was in ecstasies, and could talk of nothing but the nice minister and his dear doggie for the rest of the day, till Helen felt quite fidgetted and cross with her.

Helen took some time herself in trying to determine whether the visit had been satisfactory or the reverse. It had shown her that he was his own self, and as friendly and pleasant as need be. But he had been a long time in coming: perhaps that was shyness: he was certainly shy when he spoke of going to Kessachie. And he had never mentioned a word of music: he seemed to have forgotten that altogether. Perhaps he would have felt it out of place to discuss Chopin and the like before her less accomplished sisters. That was his tact and gentlemanlike feeling. But—and this surely outweighed everything else—he *had named his dog after her*—the dog that was given him to "console him" when he went south.

CHAPTER XXV.

STRALOGIE GAMES.

"Stralogie, 24th June.

"DEAR MOTHER.

"Herewith enclosed I send you the programme of our games, which are to be as you notice on the 7th inst. I am entered for Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 7, this year, and I believe I stand as good a chance of winning in the steeple-chase, long jump, and hurdle-race, as any fellow on the list.

'I will expect to see you all on the ground. Say to Mother that she must stop for it, and Jeanie to be sure to say so to Katie. It will be just the ploy for her. There are plenty comfortable seats in the ring; and if it's all up for her she can see fine from the top of the chine,* if you keep her on the ground. Love to all. Don't forget the 7th.

"Your affectionate son,

"P. LEDINGHAM."

'Eh what fun, what fun!' cried Lizzie and Jemmie, when this letter was read aloud. "Of course ye'll let her go, Jeanie; mustn't she, mother?"

* 'machine'—*Anglicè* carriage, vehicle.

"What do ye think, Jeanie? Would she get?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say. If her father's willin'—and the weather good—and an easy seat—I don't know what would hinder her. Would ye like it, pettie?"

"To see games! Oh yes. What like are they?"

"Eh, they're the best of fun," said Lizzie. "There's dancin' and pipes, and tossin' the caber, and jumpin'. And we'll see Patie beat them all at the jumpin'! Eh, my!"

"We'll need to write and ask leave at her father," said Margaret. "I'm thinkin', I wonder would he like to come himself?"

"Have ye got room for him?" said Helen. "He couldn't go and return, I suppose, in a day."

"We'll mak' room. If you didn't mind comin' in with me and Lizzie for a twa nights, Nellie, we'd do fine."

"I don't mind," said Helen. "But perhaps my uncle won't like to spare me so long." Helen, to say the truth, did not seem to take much interest in the proposal. She had not been in the happiest of humours of late. Neither the minister nor his dog had found their way back to Craigendykes; and only once had Horace spoken to her on a Sunday after church along with the rest of her family.

"Write and ask Uncle Argo, Nellie," said Jeanie. "He'd surely not refuse."

"And what way would we go? We'll be too many for the gig," said Helen.

‘I don’t think I’ll be to go,’ Margaret said. ‘Then we’d be yourself and Jeanie and Lizzie—Katie and the boys—Sandy must drive.’

‘Look here,’ said Sandy, ‘you’re leavin’ Esslemont o’ the count—and he’s no just that little. But if he’s here, and likes to drive, Jemmie and I’ll walk fine; but ye’ll not be over many on the machine syne.’

So the necessary letters were despatched. Uncle Argo had supposed, if Helen were anxious to stay, she would stay; but they would be glad if she would return the next day. Leslie accepted the invitation with much assurance; he was thinking long, he said, to see his little sister, from whom he had never been parted so many weeks. The games were to be on a Tuesday. On the previous Sunday, Horace Penreath’s congregation was augmented by the appearance of Mrs. Leslie of Kessaburgh, with two of her daughters, Kitty and Blanche. They came in with the family of a neighbouring proprietor with whom they were presumably staying. There was a ball in connection with the Stralogie games; and the local gentry usually had visitors for the occasion.

Helen hardly knew if she were glad or sorry to see them, though she felt that their presence must make it more homelike to Mr. Penreath. After service, they and various other friends and acquaintance were chatting in the churchyard; and Horace (who must have departed very speedily) in the midst of them. Neither Leslie nor Blanche took any notice of Helen then:

they were too much engaged ; but Kitty, always good-natured, gave her a nod and smile of recognition, over many intervening heads.

Leslie Esslemont was to come over on the Monday night. It was a warm sunny evening, and Jeanie had carried Katie down to the gate leading to the road, to have the first sight of Dada when the gig drove up. It was good to see the child's excessive delight at greeting her father ; and to Jeanie the sight of the kindly broad face that had become like a home face to her now was by no means unwelcome.

He gathered Katie up into his arms and carried her to the house, asking many questions of her, while she had as many to ask of him in return, about home, and Grannie, and so on. But when the greetings at the house were over, Leslie was not happy till he could draw Jeanie outside the door to make more special and particular enquiries about his darling.

"Tell me truly, Jeanie, what you think. Is she progressing any?"

"Indeed I think it," said Jeanie, lifting her honest face to him. "Don't *you* know a difference?"

"She has a colour eynow, but that's maybe the joy at seeing me. She's not much weightier sin' I had her in my arms last."

"No? Well, she eats better, by far, and sleeps real well, and is always happy-like, whatever."

"What about the knee? Dr. Spence bade me make particular enquiry."

"Well, I couldn't just say so much for the knee. It's not any down: still she hasn't cried about the knee in this while."

Leslie sighed. "Ye're looking well," he said prettily, just touching Jeanie's healthy sunburnt cheek with his finger. "Deeside does best wi' you, I doubt." "I'm pairfitly well, thanks," and then with lowered voice—"Has Mrs. Robbie—have they had any word?" "Eh, no. Wouldn't I have told ye? No, I doubt I'll no get word—for a while. He'd be frightened." "How's Mrs. Robbie and Agnes keepin'?"

"Mrs. Robbie's fine. Agnes is *not* well. I think she frets terrible. Once you were back again, I believe you might do her a deal of good."

"She wasna carin' very much about me when I saw her last."

"No, I know. But that was just at the time. I'll ask it's by. But we'll all be glad to see ye back, Jeanie—more than you will be to come, maybe."

"I'm ready when you require me," Jeanie said. "But I think ye should give Katie a whilie longer, as she's so well."

"I'm willin' enough, I'm sure—though I could never tell ye what it is to me to want her—if Dr. Spence agrees. But I doubt he'll be ill about noticing the knee soon; he spoke like it, whatever."

The next day—the eventful one—dawned propitiously. There was a merry party that assembled about Sandy's gig-cart, at the hour for starting: the front seat had

been carefully cushioned for Katie, by Margaret with the help of Sammy Merchant; and Jeanie was to sit beside her—Helen and Lizzie behind. Leslie was quite agreeable to the plan for his driving; he lighted his pipe first, then assumed the reins with great contentment, and started chestnut Bess in fine style. Sandy and Jemmie meanwhile had walked on ahead.

Helen had no hesitation about wearing her white dress to-day, with a pretty little black chenille cape over her shapely shoulders, and a white straw hat turned up with cream-colour, bought and trimmed for the occasion. Jeanie donned her Sunday silk, and had the satisfaction of being told by the donor that it "set her real well." She had made Katie smart with a newly-trimmed dress, and Dada had brought her a new and very becoming straw hat, in which she looked "quite a picture," Margaret said: not apparently seeing any discrepancy between a picture and "an objec'."

On the road they overtook the clergyman striding along with vigorous steps; a pipe as big as Leslie's in his mouth, and the little terrier at his heel. He gave them a merry salutation—lifting the soft black felt hat that hardly looked so much at home on his flaxen head as the little stalking-cap he was wont to wear at Strathkessachie. Katie cried out gleefully at the "dear doggie," and instantly began to give her father a long history of its excellencies, coupled with those of its master. The "new minister and his doggie" furnished sufficient conversation to last till they reached Stralogie.

A pretty rambling irregularly-built town lying in the loveliest of river-valleys, with the unfailing background of high hills. A large open green space in the centre was the scene of action; and here was a wide enclosed ring with rows of seats around it—free to subscribers, open to visitors on a small entrance fee.

Our party paid their admission and mingled with the spectators inside. Many persons preferred the short dry grass, with cloaks and plaids, to the benches; and of these were the Ledingham party, who had soon established Katie, and spread themselves out, on the grass, as luxuriously as need to be.

Highland games have been described in stories before, and it would be needless to enter into every detail of these: especially as the Stralogie meeting, though good of its local kind as to performers and attendance, would shrink into insignificance beside those typical and time-honoured gatherings patronized by Royalty and widely known to fame.

Katie and Lizzie, who had never been to such a sight before, were in the greatest state of delight at everything they saw; and indeed to the little invalid so long entirely confined to the house, the scene and the numbers alone were a sufficiently amusing sight. To all the party it was a gay and entertaining one, beside the additional and special interest, to them, of watching the exploits of Patie.

Helen's attention, however, was by no means riveted to the competitors. As group after group of spectators

entered the ring, she turned her head constantly to see if the one visitor in whom she felt any interest was among them. At length a large break containing the three Leslie ladies and their hosts drove upon the grass to deposit its contents at the entrance to the barrier, and amongst this merry party Horace Penreath had found a seat, so they must have picked him up by the way. He was always tacked on to those Leslies! but of course, they were his relations, and he had few friends in this part. They entered the ring, and became lost to Helen's view in the rows of seats behind her; the crowd was so thick that she might with perfect security turn round to look, but that great big tiresome Leslie Esslemont had taken up his position at her back, quite unconsciously intercepting her range of vision. Never mind: he was *there* somewhere; and it would not be the Mr. Penreath of old days if he did not at some time find her out and speak to her, even before his grand friends.

Helen, with the rest of her party, was perforce obliged to be interested a little later in seeing her brother vault time after time successfully over the bar; and presently in the confusion of sounds behind her a voice smote sharply and distinctly on her ear: a girl's voice, loud and merry, with a sort of cackling laugh, which she recognized at once as belonging to Kitty Leslie.

"Oh! *did* you see that, mother? a fourth time, without touching! Ah! *you* needn't think to do it" (apostrophizing the next competitor); "you're a lump of

lead, comparatively—that's right, carry away the bar! *You're* over—haven't you dislocated your back?—there's none of them like that first fellow. What are they doing now? positively raising the bar! I don't think many will do *that*. Frightful, isn't it? You don't quite like the looks of it, eh? No? he's going to try; mamma, Blanche, Horace, do look, it makes one shudder—glorious fellow!"

And many curious eyes, besides those of his brothers and sisters, watched expectantly as Peter Ledingham, pole in hand and carefully measuring his distance, approached the nine-foot bar with little tripping steps, and succeeded in putting his lithe body over it without dislodging it, amid general acclamations. That high jump was a crucial test, and only one other man shared the honour of clearing it, with Patie.

"I never saw anything so beautiful," Kitty Leslie exclaimed, enthusiastically. "What is the young fellow's name—*do* find out, Horace."

"I'll ask Macfarlane," said Horace's voice in answer, and he moved out of the row of benches, and came down, just past where the Ledinghams were sitting, without observing them. Sandy, standing beside Leslie behind the girls, observed to him that "yon was our new parson."

"Ay. We passed him upo' the ro'd. Disna tak' my eye very much. Does he promise well?"

"Nae preacher," was the curt answer. "Just a raw lad, I would say." But at that moment the "raw lad"

passed them again, and Sandy had to touch his hat. Horace responded, but did not look at the ladies on the grass, passing on with the intelligence his cousins sought.

"Ledingham — Peter Ledingham — is that young fellow's name," and at the sound of her own name, spoken by that voice, Helen's heart beat thick and fast, and she strained her ears to hear what followed. "He belongs to this part—is in a shop here."

"Ledingham! Oh perhaps he's related to the 'extensively educated,' if they live near—he's not very unlike her, is he?" For Patie was the only dark-haired one of the family, after Helen.

"I should think very probably—her brother. And I'd advise you not to make your remarks in quite such a high key, Kitty—there's a whole colony" . . . "of them sitting in front there upon the grass—the greatest swells you ever saw." The voice sank after "colony," and became inaudible to Helen; but that was how the sentence was ended.

Helen rose up from her seat, abruptly though not ungracefully. "I'm cramped with sitting," she said to her neighbour, Lizzie.

"Will ye take a turn round with Esslemont and me, Nell?" asked Sandy; "there's not much doing, and Patie's not in the next contest."

"I don't mind," said Helen, as she shook out her skirts. Anything was better than sitting there to catch those stray sentences, to be canvassed by Kitty and

her sister. For those young ladies, having nothing particular to look at just then, were peeping over at the groups in front, and making their observations, though more *sotto voce* than before.

"Oh yes, I see now. And that's the little invalid girl you were talking of going to see again, Horace. Awfully pretty little thing she is. I don't see Mr. Argo's one."

"Don't you? There she is now, just standing up with two men—a brother—and who is the big man with the dark beard, rather good-looking—Ledingham *père*?—oh no, he's dead by-the-bye. They are going off together—Miss L.'s intended, I shouldn't wonder."

Helen strolled up to the end of the long oval with her two companions; and presently they met Peter, who had donned his great-coat and was resting after his exertions. Peter was happy in the knowledge that he had gained the first vaulting prize: "and you and mother won't have so much to say about me losing my time practising," he said to his brother. "A pound-note or two at a time is no' a bad day's wage."

The company began to wend their way towards the inccheon-tent, and Sandy proposed going to fetch the basket of provisions they had brought with them to eat on the ground—"as I've no doubts but the children's hungry," he said. He started off, and Leslie offered his arm to his companion: together they walked securely back to the rest—an eminently handsome and well-assorted pair.

But behold, when they reached the spot where they

had been sitting, there was Katie hugging "the darlin' doggie" in her arms, and Horace and Blanche bending down laughing and talking to her.

"Look, look, Dada!" the child cried. "The doggie came to me its own self. Isn't it a bonnie creaturie?"

Horace looked up good-naturedly. "Won't you introduce me, little woman?" he said as he gave his hand to Leslie, who saluted him respectfully. "Your little girl wants to run away with my dog," he added, laughing, and then to Helen: "Miss Ledingham—I think I saw you in the distance. Blanche, don't you recognize your Strathkessachie neighbour?" for Blanche seemed still taken up with Katie and the dog.

Thus appealed to she lifted up her slender figure, and looked Helen full in the face with her large hazel eyes. She was tall—as tall as Helen, but slimmer: her figure had hardly lost the angularity of a very young girl. It may be remembered that Helen had taken rather a dislike to Miss Blanche, at the Strathkessachie dance, while Blanche on her part was inclined to treat Helen with some coolness. She gave her, it must be confessed, a cool stare now—only for a moment: and Helen's look, though not a bold one, was doubtful—"the mutual look when hearts are of each other" *not* "sure," but rather distrustful and jealous. "How d'ye do?" Blanche said, just holding out her hand languidly; and then putting her arm through her cousin's, "Aren't you going to take me to have some food, Horace? Mamma and Kitty have quite disappeared."

He turned at her request, saying to Katie: "You ay keep the doggie for me till I come back—if she ill stop. Ah! I said it was no go!" as the wiry little east struggled out of her arms and rushed after m almost immediately: at which Blanche laughed oud.

"Whatten a young lady is that with the minister?" eslie asked of Helen.

"Miss Leslie of Kessachie. The youngest."

"Yon's a Kessachie, is she? My mother's aye *cryin' out the family at Stra'kessachie! Penrose—what do call him—will be sweet upon her, I doubt. A very ne girl."

Helen bit her lips. "They're just cousins. He's een like a brother with them."

"That's the way, is it?" and Leslie gave a little nuckle, particularly irritating to Helen's nerves.

"I wish the doggie would stop wi' me," said Katie, little fretfully.

"Ay, but the doggie loves her master best, ye see. wonder, now, if we could get the like of sic a doggie y you. Supposin' I were to try?"

"Oh Dada—ye're nae jestin'!"

"No. But I don't just exactly know how it might o in a town placie like ours. Well, here's Sandy with ur lunch, in good time!"

So they sat themselves down around the basket, and id ample justice, for the most part, to the supplies sent

* cryin' about = talking much of

with them by Margaret. Helen alone sat apart rather moodily, only making a sort of pretence at her luncheon. She felt little appetite for it now. Things might have been so different but for *that* Blanche and Mr. Esslemont. In the old days, Horace would have offered to take *her* to luncheon; but now he could not move without cousin Blanche at his elbow; and cousin Leslie appeared to be attaching himself, by some perverse fate, to hers. Poor Leslie! he was quite innocent of any idea of paying court to the handsome Helen: she did not take his fancy, even had he been thinking about a "number twa"; but she was the oldest lady present, his favourite step-cousin's eldest daughter, and during his short visit he did try and wish to be civil to her, and he did not dislike taking a turn round the green with that handsome and stylish girl beside him.

But Helen was by no means as charming as she was handsome that afternoon. On the contrary, if the unvarnished truth has to be told, she was in an uncommonly bad temper; and she gave the poor well-meaning genial big man such short, cross, or languid answers, such scornful glances under her dark brows, that at last he gave her up in despair, and went over to Katie. "My mother's quite right," was his mental reflection. "*Our* little Jeanie is worth ten of this mighty lady—be she as handsome as ye like."

They did not stay very late in the afternoon. Jeanie thought that Katie began to show signs of weariness, and roused her father's watchful solicitude; so after

hey had seen one hurdle-race—in which Peter only came in third—they prepared to depart. Helen was ast, languidly following in the wake of her companions—for Sandy had gone for the horse, and Leslie was carrying his little girl; when she felt a lady's parasol touch her shoulder, and turning round saw behind her Kitty Leslie. "Are you going, Miss Ledingham? I've not been able to speak to you before, and I did so want to congratulate you"—the preoccupied Helen could not at first imagine why she was to be congratulated. "I am sure you must be tremendously proud—I know *I* should be, if any of my brothers vaulted like that."

"Oh, thank you," said Helen, with the least bit of a supercilious smile.

"I really never saw anything like it," Kitty went on enthusiastically. "Every one was talking of him and asking his name. By-the-bye, aren't you coming to the ball? No! We're all stopping for it. They say it's rather mixed—rather rough, unless you can have your own party and keep to it. I thought perhaps you might be going with your brothers."

"No, I am not going."

"Good-bye then." And Kitty fell back, poor girl, feeling somewhat snubbed. But she had a good laugh over it directly after. "Miss Ledingham seemed quite affronted when I praised her brother! I'm afraid I've done something quite out of the way! She evidently doesn't appreciate it at all. I hope he's not the scape-race of the family!"

They drove home without further adventure. On arriving, Helen disappeared; and immediately after tea, she signified her intention of going to bed, as she had a bad headache, and an early start in the morning.

"Nell's done up," observed Sandy after she had gone. "I don't think games are in her line."

She was dressed and ready in good time for the start next day. Leslie was leaving by the same train, and would travel with her as far as Abermurchie. When they arrived at the little station nearest Craigendykes, there was a large two-horse waggonette just setting down Mrs. Leslie and her daughters, also on their return home; and Horace Penreath appeared to be seeing them off. But he was too much taken up to have anything to say to Helen, especially as she was so well squired by her cousin; though she could not help feeling that he, or at any rate the girls, saw her. Leslie put her into a carriage, and it seemed that the Kessachie party disposed of themselves in the next compartment, for their voices were distinctly audible.

"There's a regular exodus from the country," Helen heard Horace say, speaking in at his cousins' window. "Oh yes," in another voice, "Miss Ledingham, and . . ." some words were inaudible—"she'll be going our way, of course. But she won't condescend to . . ." "now that . . ."—and then came Kitty's laugh. "I didn't venture."

Helen abruptly drew up her window. Those fragmentary snatches were too much to be borne, though they had a strange fascination for her ears. But she

could not shut out the loudly-spoken farewells. "Good-bye, Horace—make haste and get a *locum tenens*." "Mind and get him before the twelfth, you poor miserable boy, and then you can come and *look at* the dear little grouse and hares and roe being slaughtered from a *respectful* distance."

"Oh no, thank you, catch me!" from Horace, and that was the last thing Helen heard as the train began to move.

Helen leant back in her seat, silent and abstracted. She continued so much so, and gave such apathetic replies to her companion's attempts at conversation, that he was convinced in his own mind that "the girl had taken a most unaccountable dislike at him," and after a few stations he relieved her of his presence and withdrew to the smoking compartment. She saw no more of him till they changed for the north-line, and then again when he wished her good-bye at Abermurchie.

In the sweet summer afternoon she reached Mont-dolie, where the Strathkessachie party also got out. She kept well in the background. "There's something waitin' ye the day, Miss Helen," Andrew Grant said, and escorted her to the farmer's gig which her uncle had appointed to meet her. Andrew Grant had not yet been able to effect "a shift" of station: in fact he had on second thoughts resigned himself to circumstances, and preferred remaining where he was. "Ye mind your friends all well, I hope?" he ventured to ask. "Ye'll have enjoyed your rove?"

“Thank you, yes;” but Helen’s face belied her. Jogging along through the familiar ways of her present abode, however, a certain comfort came back to her perturbed spirits. The meeting of which she had dreamed through many weary months had come unexpectedly—had been to a certain extent disappointing. But she must allow, she felt, for changed circumstances. “He” was diffident and backward: of course as the new clergyman he felt that all eyes were upon him, and did not like to give occasion yet for being talked about in connection with Miss Ledingham. Very right. But he was coming—coming back to the old neighbourhood, the old scenes which were dear as the place of their first meeting; and surely in the old scenes the old sympathy and the old joy would come back to Helen. So she went to her uncongenial situation, hugging the sweet hope to her heart; and lived on expectant.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KATIE SAYS HER CATECHISM.

JEANIE's visit at home was protracted some time after elen's departure. For little Katie was apparently doing so well in her country life that Margaret said it could be "a sin" to take the child away yet. Leslie was only too thankful to find anything that benefited her, but as it was important to have the doctor's opinion, he persuaded his old friend Dr. Spence to come over with him for the day to inspect her.

Dr. Spence was very well satisfied with her general appearance and increase of strength, but he did not show so much pleasure as Jeanie at any rate expected; and when it came to the knee he looked very grave, and was very uncommunicative indeed. However, the result of his visit was that Katie was pronounced certainly better to remain where she was at present, as she was gaining in many respects, and the country life was in her favour. So poor Leslie consented to leave her again: rather heavy-hearted it must be said, for no one could tell how sorely he needed her; but her good was

the first consideration with him, then and always. Katie was the gainer on the whole no doubt. For there had been the hay-making time, a new experience to her altogether. It was a fine dry season; and it was supreme bliss to the little town-bred maiden to be carried out by Sandy or Margaret into the broad sunny field and comfortably seated by Jeanie in a regular nest of sweet clover-hay, with baby Leslie for her companion, while Jeanie and her brothers and sister worked the live-long day; not forgetting to come and "notice" her from time to time. And Sandy and Jemmie would let her think she was rendering most important assistance by helping now and then to make "raips" with the "thraw crook"—as they call the twisted iron implement with a wooden handle, used for turning the hay-bands for securing the "coles"—Anglicè, cocks; for the making of these coles is a serious affair, as in wet or rough weather they often have to remain many days in the field. All this Katie enjoyed thoroughly; the only wish being ever for the presence of her sympathizing father to share her amusements.

Horace Penreath did not succeed in finding a *locum tenens* before the twelfth. Indeed if he had, it would hardly have been excusable to leave his charge so immediately on his appointment. He stayed at his post, which was not an arduous one; and tried honestly, according to his lights, to do his duty. He certainly looked rather forlorn and low-spirited, at times; but managed to obtain consolation now and then in a

day devoted to the eminently clerical pastime of fishing.

After Helen had left, he did find his way up to Craighendykes again; partly on Katie's account, partly also I think on account of Mrs. Ledingham's "new-milked milk" and superior short-bread, of both which he showed a youthful appreciation most gratifying to the worthy mistress. On this occasion he brought a very pretty little grilse, of his own catching, for Mrs. Ledingham's acceptance; receiving many, and to his English ears, quaintly expressed, thanks, such as that there was no occasion for him to have troubled himself so much—but that it would be a terrible treat to the wee lassockie, who was right ill about a bit of fish. Also he brought his inseparable companion Nell the terrier for Katie's amusement; and a large roll of back numbers of "Punch" which he said she might keep. Katie was excessively gratified; but on this second occasion of his visit she seemed a little ill at ease, as if something were on her conscience. She had been holding the dog in her arms, on her chair, for some time, while Horace had been talking to her in his ordinary good-humoured way; when all at once, with a blushing countenance, she looked up at him, asking abruptly:

"Are you a right ordained minister, sir?"

Horace laughed outright, her manner and question were so quaint. "Why, what's the matter—don't I look like one?" he said, glancing down at what he considered a most irreproachably clerical rig-out—black

cloth certainly, but the upper portion having a strong affinity to a shooting-jacket.

"You hav'n't asked me to say my Catechis'," Katie explained.

"What a terrible neglect of duty on my part! Ought I to have asked you the first time?"

"Whisht, Katie, stupid," said Margaret, rather scandalized; but Katie went on: "Mr. Fyffe always hears me say it once in a month—and I haven't said it once since I was here." And having thus delivered herself, Katie bent down her blushing face till it almost touched the dog's yellow head.

"Do you want to say it to me? Come on, then—I'll hear you now if you like."

Katie drew herself up with some dignity. "Then Nell must go down," she said.

"Yes, to be sure. And I'm afraid I must ask Mrs. Ledingham to lend me a prayer-book, as I didn't bring one."

"Can ye no hear me wantin' a book?" asked Katie, quickly. "Mr. Fyffe never seeks a book."

"Katie, ye shouldna be so forward," Margaret said. "Pray excuse her, sir—she's used to be terrible made o'—but she shouldna speak so much to the like o' yersel'!"

"Never mind, Mrs. Ledingham," said Horace, who was nothing if not good-natured. "Thanks," as she handed him a well-worn, old-fashioned, respectable large-type Common Prayer. "I'm afraid I haven't such a good memory as your friend, Katie." He was just

out to begin, when Nell for some unexplained reason suddenly sat bolt upright. "She wants to say her catechism too," said her master—"I'm sure *I* can't tell who her sponsors were, if *she* can." He added the last remark rather as if to himself. But Katie would not even smile.

"Please, I think she'll need to be put outside," she said. "I mustn't look to her, ye know." So this was done, and Katie's sensitive conscientiousness satisfied; after which they began in earnest. Katie went through her answers with great clearness and exactness; she had been most carefully and reverently taught.

"That's a good girl," he said, when she had finished; and Katie sat evidently expecting some further instructions to follow. But poor Horace was not prepared for anything of the kind. He had taken classes in his father's Sunday school often enough; but it was quite another thing to "expound" to this precocious little maiden with Mrs. Ledingham and her girls sitting by criticizing. So he got up, and said he must go; and repeated that Katie had done very well, and that *next* time he came he would bring a little book of questions on the Catechism and see how much she could answer him. "I hope you're convinced now that I'm not an impostor," he added.

"I dinna know what that is," said Katie.

"A wolf in sheep's clothing, then."

"Eh no, ye're no a wolf, sir. Good-bye. *Mr. Fyffe* always gives me a kiss when he goes." She lifted up

her pathetic little face with a gesture which he could not resist.

"I didn't know I might take such a liberty! What an original child it is!" he added half aside, as he went out.

"I'm real vexed she was so forward, sir," Margaret said, as he was taking leave of her. "She be to have minded her manners better. But she has no mother, poor thing, and her father pets her, and winna hae her rebukit—and she aye says just what's in her mind—ye'd wonder the things she says, at a time."

"I wish every one spoke their minds," said Horace, and added, "she seems a very clever child."

"Ay, sir, awat she's clivver, and teirrible well lairnt. And I never sa' a little lassie so mindfu' upo' good things; and real patient she is, poor thingie, for the trouble she's come through, and never like to be quit o'."

"What is the matter with her?"

Mrs. Ledingham explained, winding up with her favourite assertion that Katie "would never be but an objec', supposin' she did grow up, which wasna like to be."

"Indeed! I'd no idea it was so bad as that!" he said kindly. "I'm awfully sorry, poor little thing," and after musing for a moment he went on: "If there's anything I could bring her—that I could get, which would do her good, I do wish you would tell me—I'm going into the county town to-morrow."

"Ye're very mindful, Mr. Penreath; there's really no occasion. She has all her comforts, poor lammie. And her father's a weel-aff mairchan', has none but hersel'; and awat he grudges nothing upo' his Katie. She isna want. But she's been accustomed being noticed by the minister, and if ye was callin' at a time to see her, if it was not too much trouble—"

"I shall certainly come again. And please let me know at any time if I can be of any use. I hope to—mean I expect I shall be away *next* month, but I shall certainly tell whoever comes in my place to see after her."

"Thank ye, sir. I don't know, I'm sure, how long ye shall keep her wi' us. Her own doctor was over allin', and said she was doin' fine wi' the strong air and that, but I could see he would like her under his own eye to nottice her, and that canna be so far out ver. I'm real obliged to ye, Mr. Penreath, to be so mindful o' her."

"Good-bye. I hope you have good accounts from Miss Ledingham, by the way, since she left you."

"Thank ye, sir, yes, I have." And he walked away, and Margaret turned back to the house. "Awat he's a real nice lad, the young minister," she said to Jeanie, only that he's strange-like to his wark. It seems to me," she went on in her mild tone, "a right peety, to a young fella like him, not to be put for a while wi' some experienced man; it would be a heap better for him nor setting him doon in a place like this, where a' thing's

strange, and so many amusements amo' the gentry to distract him from his wark."

"Nellie said that he was a good man," observed Jeanie.

"Ay, Nellie was sair taen up wi' him, some way," said the mother.

"Doesn't it seem curious-like"—Jeanie was beginning, but checked herself suddenly, blushing.

"What's curious?" asked Katie, quickly. "Say, Jeanie."

"Maybe I've no right to say what I thought—but I was thinking it was curious the doggie was Nell, ye know."

"Hoots, lassie! ye dinna think he'd be for naming the doggie after her!" said her mother.

"Ye mind," said the sagacious Katie, "he said he didn't know who the doggie's sponsors were? I doubt he wasna just altogether right to be funnin' with the Catechis'. But he's a *darling* mannie whatever!" was her final verdict; "and I *do* love the beastie."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DR. SPENCE'S OPINION.

IN the meanwhile poor Leslie Esslemont was "think-
; very long" without his little daughter. Of course
annie missed her too; but Grannie had her work to
—extra work, inasmuch as she missed Jeanie's help,
uch had become habitual. She tried, poor body, to
ake it as cheerful as she could for her son; but she
s fain to admit that she was an old woman growing,
d it was some dull for the like of Leslie, who was not
t past his prime, to have no other companion save her-
f. She began to look forward now and then in those
ys, to what it might be some time hence, if Katie
re indeed taken from him. And though she would
t have elected Miss Penelope Spence herself as a
lpmmeet for him, she felt in her secret heart a little of
at lady's opinion that it was a pity he did not enter
re into society, and form some friendship that might
en into a lasting consolation by-and-by.

Miss Spence came very often to see Grannie in those
ys; but the dear provost would never allow himself

to be caught. He was almost morbidly afraid of her visits now that he could be no longer chaperoned by Katie and Jeanie; and refused persistently the constant invitations, verbal or otherwise, to tea with the doctor. And Miss Spence took to croaking very decidedly over poor Katie; not speaking explicitly—her father kept her too much in subjection for that—but hinting in many subtle ways that “dear papa” was not all satisfied about her. Grannie listened to it all with great coolness, and said little. She had her own views, but she was not to have them carried all over the town by Pennie Spence.

However, Dr. Spence showed his anxiety by going over again to Deeside, on his own account, without saying a word to her father even, to see Katie; and having seen her, had arrived at the conclusion that the time had come for him to speak openly, on one point at least, to her father.

Late one afternoon he called on Leslie at his office, and remained closeted with him for some time. Leslie came home very shortly after their conversation was over; and his mother perceived immediately that something, she knew not what, had occurred to disturb him greatly, for he was quite white and shaky.

“Spence was over seein’ Katie yestreen,” were his first words, spoken in a voice of such repressed agitation that Grannie looked up in alarm, saying, “She’s nae grown suddenly waur?”

“Nae her health. It’s the trouble in her knee. Spence has app’nted me to meet him and another

doctor fra town upon Tuesday. He's not willin' to take the whole orderin' o' the case himself without further advice; but he's convinced in his own mind—says he as been this while—that the child 'll be to lose her leg."

"Eh! ye dinna say, Leslie! The poor wee lamb!" Mrs. Peter exclaimed in sad concern; but seeing how sorely upset and unnerved he was, she tried to speak more comfortingly. "It's maybe to save her frae waur, we know—the like of him would ken."

Poor Leslie stood looking straight before him out of the window: his strong face working, his kind eyes full of tears. "What way ever will we get her told?" he suddenly said.

"Fy, Leslie, ye wouldn't tell the like o' her—nae till the actual moment maybe."

"I don't know what way I'll give my consent to it, whatever," he said, still standing motionless in the same attitude.

"It'll be her life that's dependin' on it," his mother said. "I've had sair doubts mysel' this long time about the knee."

"Ay. It's that that Spence says—the knee will be her death; but I know better than he does. What's a creature like her, to want her leg?"

"I've haird of such cases—" Grannie was beginning, but he interrupted her. "No, I see how it will be, as I'd been told. She'll just have all to go through and suffer, and it'll no save her after all. If she disna die o' their hands, she'll no survive it long."

And then he sat down, in the deep window-sill, and covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Leslie, laddie, dinna fret so sair. It winna be so ill maybe as ye think. Ye know they do all that operations now wi' no pain, and she'll maybe hae less to thole nor what she has, this mony a time,"—the mother laid a caressing hand on her son's shoulder. "Ye know yerself, she can never be stoot and well-like, as long as she lives, and we must submit to what the Lord ordains, and try our best to save her fra' sufferin' i' the meantime."

But poor Leslie would not be comforted, or speak again, for some time; though at length he lifted up his head and told his mother more of what the old doctor had been saying. "He'd thought over all the arrangements for me, how to suit best," he said. "She'll be to go in to the Infirmary, and be there a month, maybe. And he's plannin' that after this other doctor has seen her, if he agree, she should go straight in from where she is. He was for her to stop as long as possible on Deeside, ye see, to get up her strength all she could; and so that is the best chance for her." And then he added, "There's been no one this long while whose opinion I would take before auld Spence's—but I would give all that I'm worth now to find that he's in the wrong!"

They spent a sad and silent evening together, those two. And it was a very sad expedition that Leslie took on the appointed day to Craigendykes. But Leslie had

got over the first shock of the announcement, and was calm and self-controlled now; though he felt like the greatest traitor when he greeted poor unconscious Katie. The consultation was little more than formal, the stranger's opinion coinciding exactly with Dr. Spence's own; and the arrangements were then and there made, and explained privately to Margaret, who was to keep Katie with her till her father fetched her into town. Jeanie was to travel with her, and then to return to her mother's till Katie should be pronounced well enough to be taken out to Abermurchie.

Poor Jeanie felt the whole affair terribly. Of course, like others, she was obliged to repress all traces of agitation, to appear calm and cheerful before Katie. And Jeanie being both a brave and an unselfish girl managed to do this pretty well. But none knew what she suffered inwardly: how, when poor Katie was sleeping soundly, Jeanie lay awake thinking of the dread before her. Leslie, in the midst of his own anxiety, could not but be much touched by her appearance when he met her before their journey; she had such a subdued pale sorrowful look, and her voice when she spoke was so grave and constrained, as if under strong pressure of feeling.

But she managed to keep from breaking down then, and when they started, and took their places in the train, on a bright September morning. The harvest was just beginning, and Jeanie's lengthened stay at home was an advantage to her mother and brother,

as she was able to help as of old in the harvesting operations, which naturally she would much have enjoyed; but she could not look forward to it now. It almost upset her self-command, as it was, when before they had started from their own station, Katie, who was looking out of the window, suddenly gave a little cry of delight. "Eh! there's the doggie! the minister and Nell."

"The minister" looked up good-naturedly at the voice, and nodded. He was evidently going to travel at the same time, for he had a little baggage with him, and amongst his personal effects something suspiciously like a gun-case. He looked very happy too—rather like a boy leaving school. "How d'ye do, Katie? so you're running away at last. What a *jolly* day, isn't it?" with much emphasis. "How are you, Mr. Esslemont?"

"Oh, won't ye come in here with Nell?" said Katie eagerly. "There's lots of room, see."

"Lots of room, is there? sure I sha'n't incommode you? well, let's see. I've got Nell's ticket all right, so perhaps if Miss Jane has no objection—" and in he jumped—gun-case, Nell, and all.

Both Leslie and Jeanie were almost grateful for the diversion, especially as the companionship of Nell was unbounded delight to her poor little fellow-traveller. And they might just as well have Horace Penreath in the carriage as some stranger.

"So you're going home, little woman," he said presently, as the train started. "Glad or sorry to go?"

"She's going to town for a little," Leslie answered for her, and Jeanie felt how much was hidden under the quiet tone.

"To town! that will be a change, won't it?" Katie did not answer immediately. She did not of course know all that was before her, but there had been some difficulty in reconciling her to what she did know of the arrangement, and Jeanie was relieved when she only answered by the question: "Are ye going to town too, Mr. Penreath?"

"I—no; I'm going to the moors."

"Ye'll be goin' up to Kessachie, probably?" said Leslie.

"Yes. Do you know Kessachie?"

"I have been there, but not for some years. My father and mother both were from that part."

"There are some people of your name living there now," said Horace, feeling a little diffident of suggesting a relationship between the honest but extremely rough and homely grieve of Strathkessachie, and this polished, well-dressed, and as Margaret Ledingham had phrased it "weel-aff mairchan'."

"Quite so. They are near friends of my own. I haven't seen them for long. The old man wears well, understand."

"Yes; he seems a tough old fellow. He is perfectly invaluable to my uncle."

"He's quite an old-fashioned sort of a person," Leslie said, with a little smile; "but I doubt he's none the worse of that."

"No. My uncle often says he doesn't know how he should get on without him."

So they talked, on these little indifferent matters; and Jeanie listened, feeling at last that it was almost beyond endurance. The train was a slow one, but the stations seemed to follow each other so cruelly fast! And now the suburbs of the town were beginning to stretch around them; and poor Jeanie's heart sank lower and lower with that terrible sickness of soul, of which most of us have some experience, that comes with the anticipation of a parting and a dread that we cannot escape. The presence of even this fellow-traveller—the only one they had—seemed too much. Had it been Mr. Fyffe, he might have been some comfort, some support in their trouble; but this heedless though well-meaning boy, with his head full of his sport and his holiday, what comfort could he be to them or to any one in sickness or sorrow? Yet as they neared the terminus, Jeanie saw her cousin lean over and speak a few words in a whisper, in Horace's ear; and then she guessed what the whisper had been, as she saw the change that came over his face, and caught the answer. "Oh! I'm awfully sorry—for her and for you," in a low tone of genuine concern.

They were stopping now; and Katie was looking out at the platform, with a child's eager forgetfulness. Then there was a hugging and caressing of Nell, who had been sitting very contentedly in her arms for some time. "Mayn't I share some of those farewells?" Nell's

aster said, and he was very kind and attentive in helping Leslie to lift out his treasure, before he wished the three a kind good-bye. There was more warmth and feeling in tone and manner then, than either Jeanie or her cousin had given him credit for.

That was indeed a sad parting to poor Jeanie, when she had accompanied her darling to the cab, and saw it driven off with her father, quiet and calm, but looking a little bewildered and subdued. Jeanie just managed to keep up till Katie was out of sight of her; but she was crying sadly, though quietly, as she walked back to wait for the return train. When and how could she see her little Katie again?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HELEN TAKES THE HARMONIUM.

"AND who, think ye, did I meet wi' the night, as I was prickin' through the glen?"

The speaker was Mr. Argo, who had just handed the much-jaded Missie over to be unbridled by Sophy, and now threw his ungainly person down on a rough garden-bench outside his door, apparently rather wearied and heated with a long ride. Helen was sitting on the same bench dreamily prosecuting a piece of plain sewing. She did not make any immediate response, so the minister, removing his shabby old black hat, and wiping his face and brow with a large red pocket-handkerchief, repeated the question, in a tone as if he were quoting poetry.

"And who, think ye, did I meet the night, as I came prickin' through the glen? Say, my fair damsel, say?"

"How can I say?" answered the fair damsel.

"Supposin' it had been none other but yon strappin' chiel they ca' Pen—Pen—Pen—what is it again? the laird's nephew?"

"The Reverend Mr. Penreath," said Helen very quietly, though her heart began to throb.

"Reverend, do ye say? Well—he may be Reverend, some count him, or he may no. Any way he had a n upon his shoulder, and a braid bonnet upo' his heid, d as good a pair of grey shootin' breeks as e'er I saw on a young fella. Is yon your Reverend?"

"I suppose he's just down for a holiday."

"When did ye hear he was Reverend?"

"I've known it this while."

"Ye have! Ye've kept it gey close, my young lady!"
or indeed Helen had mentioned no word of the new rgyman at her mother's church, either to uncle or nt: and such an insignificant circumstance as the ap- tment of a young Englishman to an obscure chapel Deeside might easily escape the knowledge of a nister of the Establishment, so far off.

"I could not suppose it would interest you," Helen d. "He has the church near where my mother ps: that's the way *I* know."

"He has!" and Mr. Argo leant forward with his ads on his knees and peered into his niece's face. h! Helenie, Helenie, ye artful wifie that ye are! I ow fine now, why the holiday was o'er short, eh?"

"I really don't know what you're meaning, Mr. Argo," d Helen angrily, with a dusky glow on her cheeks l a dark flash out of her eyes; "or have you any iness to speak to me like that; and I should be very ch obliged if"—she saw a look in her uncle's eyes,

half-amused, half-defiant, wholly teasing, which told her it was of no use assuming the high tone; so she gathered up her work, and—very unusually for her dignity—actually flounced into the house.

To say the truth, poor Helen's temper had by no means improved since her return to the manse; and she was fain sometimes to admit to herself that she was growing cross and careless, if her young cousins had not occasionally informed her of the first at any rate. Her once beloved studies were cast aside: the children's lessons seemed more irksome than ever; the household duties an unwelcome interruption. Her snatches of leisure were often given to novels, or to practising her music—this latter chiefly when Mr. Argo was not at hand to cut his jokes: at times to practising lawn-tennis. She had discovered that her cousins were very anxious to learn to play, that it would be very beneficial to them; so uncle Argo had been coaxed and cajoled into letting a small strip of grass in his garden (which would have been much better employed in supplying hay for Missie) be mown short and rolled. Then the girls put up an old strawberry net, and clubbed together to purchase some cheap racquets and a few balls; and soon found that the tennis lesson was the most interesting of all to teacher and pupils: though poor conscientious Elsie would have her misgivings, and not unfrequently break the set to go and practise or write her French exercise.

Helen was a little ashamed of her petulance after-

wards, when in passing along the narrow passage she suddenly felt a large hand laid in a would-be caressing manner upon her shoulder, while her uncle's voice said :

"My dear, ye were affronted, I'm aware—and ye wouldn't need to be angry at your old uncle, that loves ye, and if ye were his own daughter, couldn't be more anxious to see ye well matched, as ye deserve to be !"

"Thanks, uncle," she answered, more humbly. "I am sorry I was angry, but I do not care for that sort of jesting, I must say."

"No? Well, well. Kiss and be friends. Only ye'll allow, Helenie, that what I told ye was not just altogether ill tidings? And now, ye know, ye went off in such haste that I'd no mind I'd a letter for ye in my coat-pocket; I brought up the evening's post."

Helen took the letter from him eagerly. It was in Jeanie's round fair youthful hand, which recalled to Helen's mind that there was cause for anxiety to hear Jeanie's report.

The letter was very short, as follows :

"Craigendykes, Sept. 8th.

"MY DEAR HELEN,

"Mother thinks you will like to know that I got a line from Leslie this morning saying that the operation was well over, and she had come out of it pretty well, but doesn't say much more. We are all so thankful even for this. Oh Nellie, I cannot say what it is to me to want her; I think of her night and day, and what she has had to go under, poor wee thing !

"The harvest is getting on fine, and good weather for it, but I cannot seem to think of anything but my pet, and have no spirit to write, so you must excuse a hasty letter. Mother and we all send kind loves to all.

"I remain, your affec: sister,

"J. LEDINGHAM."

"What a thorough child Jeanie is, to be sure!" Helen thought, as she folded up the letter! "One wouldn't think she had ever had any heart-sorrows. I suppose she *really* loved that good-for-nothing boy who ran off! What an escape that was! I wonder if she ever thinks of him now, or whether—no, it is too ridiculous! Those *two* have only one thought between them, and that is, Katie. Well, I'm glad she's all right so far, poor child! It's a dreadful affliction."

"Have you got word from home, my dear?" said her aunt's gentle voice. "Anything about the little lassie?"

"Yes. You can see if you please." And she handed her aunt the note.

"Poor wee wifie—poor Leslie!" Mrs. Argo said, tenderly; and tears stood in her gentle blue eyes as she looked on her own healthful flock, and thought with motherly sympathy of the playmate and friend of her youth and his one ewe lamb, so sorely stricken.

That day was a Saturday. It will hardly be surprising that Helen rose next morning and prepared for her church walk, with her head full of far other thoughts than of poor Katie, and her sister's grief. While that "child" sister, having done what she could to lighten

er mother's Sunday duties, and literally or metaphorically "anointed her head and washed her face," as walking with the rest to the little chapel at the caefoot, to lay her hopes and fears, her cares and thanksgivings, her sympathies and sorrows, both for Katie and for "that other," once more at the foot of the altar, Helen was approaching the sanctuary at Whinymuir with thoughts sadly chained to earth. Such speculations as whether the visitor would take any part in the service, whether there would be any greetings for her before or after, whether the moorland walk home would be preferred to the Strathkessachie close carriage, whether—but we need not follow them further. Let no one judge her too harshly.

Arriving, with rather weary steps, at the church-door, she heard the harmonium giving out tentative sounds; and in the little porch Kitty Leslie almost ran against her.

"Oh, Miss Ledingham, I was so wishing you might come! Do you think you could kindly play? Mr. and Mrs. Davidson are both away, gone for their holiday, and my cousin takes the duty for two Sundays (all that is allowed, poor fellow!). Blanche has been trying, but she *cannot* keep the wind in—she'll lead the singing, if you can manage it; I don't know any one else to do so," and Kitty stopped breathlessly.

If the request had been to climb to the bell-turret even and there, Helen must have said yes. "I'm quite prepared, and have no music," was what she did say;

"but if there is *no* one else—I played this harmonium once or twice last year—I don't mind trying."

"Oh, thanks so much! I've asked Horace for the hymns, and there's a chant-book there. I'm afraid there's not time to try them over, the people are filling up."

So they went into the church, Helen's tall figure, in the well-fitting and well-preserved black, towering above Kitty, in her showy chintz. A number of ladies were standing round the harmonium, in consultation apparently with Horace Penreath; but he retired into the vestry before Helen came up. And after a little more fussing over chants and places, the ladies seated themselves, and Helen took up her position. As has been said, she was not a nervous player; but she would have been more than human if she had not been nervous to-day. The harmonium was rather awkwardly placed, to begin with; sideways to the benches, close to the chancel, immediately below the clergyman's little bit of reading-stall, so that his surplice almost brushed her as she sat or knelt. And what with Horace Penreath and his critical ears on one side, and a row of fashionably-dressed young ladies on the other, each and all doing their best to "lead the singing," Helen might be excused if her fingers trembled visibly and the expression-stop throbbed with her unsteady blowing till she was obliged to put it in altogether. She hardly knew afterwards how she got through at all; but it was over at last somehow! and she made her way out almost the last of the congregation.

There were many groups of friends and neighbours uttering outside; but every one seemed too much taken up to greet Helen, who passed to the churchyard almost unnoticed. At the gate old Esslemont, who had just mounted his gig, hailed her. "Will ye no t' a ride wi's this wairm day, Missie?" But though she was both warm and tired Helen only said, "Many thanks, no, I am to walk." She had not gone many steps, however, before a rustle of skirts and jingle of chains and bracelets behind her made her turn round, and there was Kitty, who had run after her. "Oh, Miss Ledingham, I never saw you come out, and I wanted to thank you—we're all so much obliged to you for bringing us through so famously. And I wanted so to t' after the poor little girl—your niece—no, cousin, think; have you had any news of her?"

"Thank you, Miss Leslie. My sister wrote me that she had borne the operation pretty well."

"My cousin told us about her, you know. He welled in with her and her father by chance, and was so awfully sorry for her—such a dear, pretty little thing! Good-bye, Miss Ledingham, I hope you won't be very tired;" and Kitty ran back to her party. Helen walked on her lonely way, feeling more and more surprised and hurt as she found no one else overlooking her. She would not have thought anything of that, alone. But he had never come near her, to thank her; to say one friendly word of greeting or of gratitude. He could think of Katie; but he left all enquiry

or civility to be done by his cousin. How changed he was, to be sure, since last year, when he seemed so careful to avoid even the appearance of neglect, to atone for the deficiencies of others! Was it that those girls—that Miss Blanche—were jealous of his paying attention to the poor teacher—the farmer's daughter? Or had he altered his opinion of her since he had seen her home and family, and all her connections—her honest homely mother, and commonplace brothers and sisters, and that great foolish loon of a Peter, carrying on like a circus acrobat? Helen felt quite hostile just then to all her good relations and friends.

She had the legitimate excuse of a very bad headache when she had finished the long tiresome walk she might so well have been saved, if she had only taken the good old grieve's offer. And she made the most of the excuse, to go up-stairs and lie down on her bed for the rest of the afternoon; knowing that only thus could she escape from her uncle's remarks and queries. "Well, had ye a good sairmon? What like a preacher is cousin *Hor-ace* then? and did he give ye Nimrod to his text, or else Esau?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE AT STRATHKESSACHIE.

"MAMMA," said Kitty Leslie to her mother a few days later, "I wish we could do some civility by that poor pretty Miss Ledingham. She is so obliging and nice, always, if you ask her anything; and it seems to me as if we made her useful only and did nothing in return."

"I should be very glad," answered Mrs. Leslie, "but if it entails having the Argos—"

"Does it though? I'm sure poor Mrs. Argo would much rather be let alone, and *he* is insufferable. I say, I have it! Write and ask Mrs. A. to let Miss Ledingham bring up two of the girls some afternoon to tea, and a little tennis."

"I don't believe they can play, my dear."

"Oh, can't they, mother! I assure you they have the funniest little bit of a court in the middle of the minister's strawberry-beds—and by the look of the ground they practise assiduously."

"Well, try if you choose. By-the-way, Kitty, didn't

I hear some nonsense among you girls last year, about her and Horace?"

"Did you, mother?" (with one of her laughs.) "Oh, the most utter rubbish, it must have been."

"Because you know, dear, it would be very unfair to her, now, if—"

"Mamma, how can you?" Kitty really blushed. "Besides, if I say Thursday afternoon, if fine, it will be perfectly safe, for the boys are absolutely certain to be on the hill all day. Maude and I can amuse her and the girls."

So the invitation was despatched. And it will easily be imagined how Miss Ledingham and her pupils responded to it, and how they presented themselves duly, in holiday attire, at the appointed time. They were first shown into the drawing-room to Mrs. Leslie and her two elder daughters, and then Kitty proposed going out at once. In the garden these two young ladies, who had nothing to do that afternoon, and moreover rather liked now and then entertaining people who were unsophisticated and easily amused, devoted themselves most amiably to playing with the guests at lawn-tennis. Only Helen's strokes became very uncertain and aimless because a little yellow terrier whom she recognized came up and ran about the ground and chased the balls, though repeatedly called to order by Kitty.

The girls had taken the fancy to have tea laid in a little summer-house, feeling sure that Miss Ledingham

and the little Argos would enjoy it. And so they sat, a merry party, and ate strawberries and cream, and chattered gaily; and the dog came and begged, and delighted the children almost as much as it had poor Katie Esslemont.

"Ah, you're very miserable to-day, poor Nell, because you can't go to the hill with your master," Kitty said. 'She bothers them rather; but she's capital at rabbiting, aren't you, miss?'"

"She has a right to a good nose," said Maude. "It was her mother that found the keys, wasn't it?"

"No; her *grandmother*, Maude—the old original Nell. Only think, Miss Ledingham, she found—this dog's ancestress, found a bunch of keys my father had dropped in the most out-of-the-way place in the heather!"

"She was much prettier, the old Nell," said Maude; 'she was blue, not yellow,'"

"Yes. You're an ugly little brute, you know," said Kitty, playing with the dog's ears; "of course that's why we gave you away—but you're the joy of your master's heart, and you know it."

I do not think that Miss Ledingham found this conversation very enlivening. She leant back in the rustic seat, looking rather pale and tired: so much so that when Maude proposed all going for a run round the wood path by the burn, and the children jumped up eagerly, Kitty said: "You may go if you like—Miss Ledingham's much too exhausted—and so am I."

So the indefatigable Maude went off with the

young Argos, and Kitty and Helen remained somewhat luxuriously in the arbour. After a few minutes, Blanche, who had not appeared before, sauntered out and joined them. "How d'ye do, Miss Ledingham? any tea left for me, Kitty?"

"Last come last served," said Kitty. "Yes, I think there's a little—not over hot."

"Never mind then, I'll have cream—thanks"—and Miss Blanche began helping herself with a liberal hand to strawberries and then sat down to eat them.

"It's lucky for you there are any left, Blanche," said Kitty. "You ought to have been here in time, but you think you may take any liberties you please, don't you, now? and make the most of your privilege while it lasts." And then, turning to Helen, Kitty went on, in a less bantering tone, through still lightly—"I think I must tell Miss Ledingham—you've always been so kind and friendly with us. I don't think we mind talking about it now, do we, Blanche? Mamma means to tell Mr. Argo, the first time—Yes, Miss Ledingham, this child's going to get married—isn't it a shame, the youngest first? I suppose I needn't tell you to whom—seeing as how"—Kitty rattled on, a little nervously perhaps, in her usual style—"they've been carrying on together, in the most unblushing way, since they were infants—Horace and she."

It would not be easy to describe the feelings of Helen. Unprepared she ought not to have been; but the confirmation of her worst suspicions—for, blind herself as she

might, she had her suspicions—seemed almost to stun her; and she felt in that first moment as if all the pulses within her, and all those of the world outside, came to a sudden stop. But she was a woman of strong self-command and reserve; and after the first shock, though she turned white, even to her lips, from which came a faint helpless “Oh” of surprise, she made no further sign. She even collected herself to say—though her own voice sounded strange and far away for the singing in her ears: “Indeed. I was not aware. I—congratulate you, Miss Blanche.”

“Thanks,” said Blanche, rather carelessly; and Kitty took it up for her: “Yes, I knew you would care to know, you are so kind. Of course it won’t come off just yet—the boy has to get himself ordained first—fully ordained, you know—in December; but when that is all over, after Christmas, we hope perhaps it may take place.”

Helen hardly heard what followed, though she relieved Kitty was speaking. But presently with merry voices Maude and the children came back from their race. “We saw the boys just now,” said Maude to her sisters. “Such a splendid bag!”

“What is it?”

“Twenty-three brace, four hares—great big fellows—Horace got eighteen out of the twenty-three. Not bad for the time they were out.”

“I think we’ll require to leave,” said Helen to Elsie, rising up with such a pale face that Kitty could not but

observe it, and said, "I'm afraid you're tired. Won't you come indoors and rest before the walk?"

"No, thanks. I think we'll just go straight home. And will you wish Mrs. Leslie good-bye, and thank her, for us? I will not seek to trouble her again. Please say the children have enjoyed themselves so well." She was nervously anxious to get away now; for she had a vision of figures about the house-door: shooting-jackets, and guns, and tired pointers crouching at their keeper's heel. And Nell was off like a shot to greet the returning sportsmen.

So Helen and her cousins made their farewells, and set off on their homeward way—avoiding the house by a circuit through a woodland path.

She spoke nothing during the walk home, except it might be a few unconscious monosyllabic replies to the young companions, from whom it was "Helenie this," and "Helenie the other" all the way. Of one thing she was fully determined—that she would make no secret of what she had heard, at the manse. She would have too much proper pride, too much self-respect, to show that she "cared a hair" for the tidings she had heard; and she would also silence at once and for ever her uncle's bantering.

So when the family were assembled, and Elsie and Maggie had entertained their parents with an account of their delightfully pleasant afternoon (Mr. Argo being in the humour to be paternally, benignant) and had now run out of doors to look after their poultry and

hat not, Helen broke in quietly: "You haven't asked
e for my news, uncle."

"And have ye any for me, lassie? Say on then,
all means."

"Well. Miss Blanche Leslie—the youngest—is en-
ged to the Reverend Mr. Penreath."

"*Qu-hat?*" exclaimed the minister, as much thunder-
uck apparently as Helen herself had been. "Do I
ar aright?"

"Miss Leslie was my informant."

"Well, if ever I haird! And so they've landed him,
ongst them! Ah! Helenie, Helenie, I doubt ye
ven't played yer cards as ye should, or they'd never
ve got him from ye—"

"I—play my cards!" exclaimed Helen, rising with
demeanour worthy of a queen of tragedy. "I—
at on *airth* are you meaning, Mr. Argo, to speak
me thus?"

'Hoot-toot-toot, young lady! There's no occasion
mount upon yer high horse—I mean what I'm
ing, and know what I'm speaking about. Do you
an to pretend to tell me that yon lad was not at
ur feet last year? and if you hadn't showed him your
ghtiness, and your temper—siclike as you've done
the poor old minister, this many a time, I'm ready
lay any odds ye might have been Mistress Penreath
en ye liket, let the laird's lasses do what they
ased. That's what *I* mean to say, Helen Ledingham
and I say, moreover, ye're a feel "(fool, foolish)" lassie,

to lose yer chance, and the lad's a poor pitiful creature to let himself be twisted and turned any way Madam of Kessachie and her girls please. But Strathkessachie shall hear of this, and what way his reverend nephew has played *my* niece false, before he's many hours older, or—"

"Mr. Argo! I *shall not* listen to such words! and more than that, you shall not go and make mischief, and raise false reports about me! I never thought to have to speak in such a manner, but if I'm driven to it I must speak, and you're witness what I say, Aunt Elspet!" She spoke with an excited vehemence which, from the usually calm sedate Helen, made poor little Mrs. Argo positively tremble. "I say that the Reverend Mr. Penreath has behaved most honourably! He has not spoken to me, or come near me, since he has been here this time—or did he at home, more than he was actually obliged to recognize me, walking with my sisters, and so on."

"Likely no, Helenie," said Mr. Argo, who having cooled down a little from his state of excitement was assuming his provoking cool tone with her. "But calm yourself, calm yourself, lassie. I'm no speakin' o' this year; it's like cousin Blanche would have him under her thumb, now—but what did I see with my own eyes last year, about the pee-ana, and one thing and another—and what did I hear about the dancing, and how that some should say there wasna a bonnier couple in the room than Missie Ledingham and the

laird's nephew—come now, what can ye say for that?"

"How much more am I to listen to?" cried poor Helen in despair. "I know not what fool's tales you have been taking up, Mr. Argo; but I know," quivering with anger, "it's not the first time you have, and it's not to your advantage in your position." For in truth it was too well and widely known that Mr. Argo's information was picked up in the most wonderful and miscellaneous ways, and used often most unscrupulously. "I say, and I would say before all the world, that Mr. Penreath never said or did anything with regard to me, that—that any one might not have done. Mr. Argo has chosen to build up some ridiculous castle in the air, on his own fancies, and to give me, for one, a great deal of annoyance; but after what I have said now, I beg that the subject may never be brought up to me again, or my name mentioned in connection with Mr. Penreath." And here the last remnant of poor Helen's tragic fortitude gave way, and she swept up to her own apartment, which fortunately she found empty. Locking the door to prevent the intrusion of its joint occupant Sophy, Helen threw herself upon her bed, in a paroxysm of violent, hysterical, but almost voiceless sobs, such as she had never indulged in since she had come to woman's estate—though her mother could remember that as a child her rare fits of crying were of this stormy kind. She had been wound up to the highest pitch of excitement, coming immediately

upon a great mental shock; and it would have been strange indeed had not her woman's nature broken down at last. She had spoken under very strong pressure—spoken the unvarnished truth in her generous impulse to defend the man to whom she had given unsought her affections; but the truth, as she felt and knew it to be, was no less bitter—humiliating also, to a person of Helen's natural pride and reserve. She was honest above all things, and with all her faults; and even if she had not been obliged to give utterance to the truth, she could not have denied it in her heart. She *had* tried to blind herself, she knew. Her discontent with her temporary home, her aspirations for some different sphere from that in which she was placed, had led her on imperceptibly to attach meanings to words and actions which indeed honestly weighed they would not bear. This young man, who had spoken kindly to her once or twice, who out of the natural goodness of his heart had tried to give a little pleasure to the humble teacher-girl who was trying her utmost to serve him and his friends—who had been drawn into a young man's natural deference and admiration for something graceful and pleasing and simple—would have been greatly astonished had he known to what lengths Helen's lively imagination had carried her: though it is quite possible that by some of the many ways in which, for weal or woe, human souls understand one another, he may have perceived a growing interest on her part, which for every reason,

f honour, prudence, and consideration for the feelings of others, he would feel bound to discourage. Helen could not honestly blame any one but herself for her present trial; unless she included her uncle, whose illusions and banterings, however much she disliked them, had tended rather to stimulate than check her aspirations.

Helen did not appear again in the family circle that night: indeed she was far too much exhausted by the shock and excitement she had undergone, to attempt it. Before she admitted poor Sophy to her room she had repaired herself for the night; and if not asleep, she kept up the pretence of it so as not to be obliged to speak to her young companion. But next morning she rose as usual, all traces of the previous day's agitation gone, except perhaps the unwonted compression of lips and brow, a somewhat increased paleness of tint—and set herself with a severity for some time past unwonted to the ordinary tasks of the day.

CHAPTER XXX.

KATIE'S HOME-COMING.

"Abermurchie, 12th Oct.

"DEAR JEANIE,

"I am informed that my poor little girl is sufficiently better to be brought home on Saturday first. I will be glad if you can return that day, arranging to meet us at the terminus for the 4.45 north train. Katie is wearying to see you. With best regards to all,

"Yours truly,

"LESLIE ESSLEMONT."

This note Jeanie received on the evening of a long day spent in the harvest-field, the conclusion of that year's "leading" on Craigendykes.

She had borne the weeks of anxiety and waiting patiently and cheerfully, falling back naturally into her old place of the active home daughter, and finding comfort in the conscientious performance of such duties as came to her hand.

Yet it was a sincere pleasure to her to know that she was required back again to resume her charge. Little Katie had wound herself very closely round her Jeanie's

heart; and Jeanie felt besides a clinging to the scene of her own young life's romance and cruel disappointment, an inward feeling that there if anywhere she was most likely to have tidings of the poor misguided boy to whom her faithful heart still clung. Also she hungered somewhat for the meeting with Agnes Robbie, who had once or twice written to her during her absence, and who seemed to long for the renewal of their old friendship.

So, though she was sorry to part from her mother and sister, it was with some gladness of heart that she found herself travelling towards the place of meeting.

There was no great interval between the times of the two trains; and very soon after her arrival at the town terminus she saw Leslie come into the station, carrying his poor little girl in his arms, rolled in a large plaid, like a baby. Little Katie's face was looking very white and pinched, but it lighted up with the old eager smile when she caught sight of Jeanie.

But when they had taken their places and Jeanie was sitting opposite, she could even now perceive a change in the child's face, a look as though she had grown a year at least older since she went into the hospital. All the way out she was very still and quiet, lying on her father's knees—she would not let him put her down on the cushions; and though she would now and then smile at him or at Jeanie, she would more often close her eyes as if wearied and wishful to shut out the moving scenes as they glided by. Neither of

her guardians spoke much on the journey. Leslie was entirely wrapped up in his precious charge, watching every look with loving solicitude; and Jeanie was equally solicitous—feeling now and then a sort of fear lest she should be insufficient for her duties; lest with all her care and love, her deftness should not be equal to her anxiety.

When at length they reached their own door, there was Miss Spence standing beside Grannie—who was looking rather ill at ease—watching for the arrival.

“No—of course, of course I’m not going to stay *one minute*—but I could not have kept away if I had been paid for it, and I thought perhaps, if Jean Ledingham had not been ready or anything, I might have given Grannie a little assistance—and as it is, I’ve been helping her to prepare for the poor dear, dear, little darling! Yes, my lamb, I thought I *would* be here to give you the first kiss!” and as Leslie, without paying any heed to anybody, had walked straight in and laid Katie down on her sofa, Miss Spence now bent over her effusively, murmuring tender words, and kissing her repeatedly.

“Where’s Grannie?” poor Katie asked, when she could get breath for the kisses.

“Grannie! Oh, yes, here she is, and I’m away now; only you must just let me show you the pretty cushion I’ve worked every bit my own self! I made it for the Countess’s bazaar, you know, but when I heard my pet was coming so soon, I bought it in at once for fear it

ight be taken, and I was determined she should have—see, the little birdies on the bough; isn't it pretty?"

"I doubt she's wearied, and needin' to her bed," Grannie said. "She'll thank you another day, Miss Spence," and the old lady began to unloose some of the child's travelling wraps. "Oh yes, I'm away, I'm away," and Miss Spence hopped into the background; but she was *not* away, for the next minute Leslie, standing a little apart, heard a whisper at his elbow of "provost, provost," and the little lady had caught hold of his hand. He thought it was to say good-bye, and gave her a little shake. "Yes, provost dear—you have—you have my entire sympathy in this—this new trial. But we must hope the best—and you know papa has every hope—every hope for her now!"—which, as "papa" had not yet seen Katie since her operation, was rather a bold assertion on his daughter's part.

"Thank goodness, she's away," said the ungrateful provost, when she had departed; "and now hist ye, you two, and get the child to her bed, for she's real weary, the creature—and I'm frightened we'll have Grannie Robbie in about."

Grannie Robbie did come "in about," before Katie had finished languidly taking her tea. Her visit was almost worse than Miss Spence's, for she was more doleful and fearful over poor Katie than ever; and displayed, moreover, a morbid satisfaction in asking questions and dwelling on details, that made both Leslie and Jeanie very

uncomfortable. It was a sincere relief to all when she too departed, which was not until she had had her cup of tea along with them.

Jeanie was thankful when that first evening was over. She had felt beforehand a kind of nervous dread, by no means unnatural, of waiting upon her poor little cousin now. But when it came to the actual time, she was cool and efficient; too unselfishly brave to be nervous, too anxiously loving to be otherwise than deft and tender.

When Katie had been undressed and made ready for her bed, however, she insisted that Dada was to lift her into it. He was not far to seek; only standing at his house-door accordingly to his frequent habit: and he came in at once and took the little girl in his strong tender arms, in which she always felt especially safe and comfortable, and laid her down upon her pillows—~~as~~ gently as mother or nurse might do with a sleeping infant. He tucked the coverings carefully around her, and then hung fondly over her, for a few last whispers.

“I’m glad I’m back again at home,” Katie said, looking up at him. “It’s such a *long* long time since I was here.”

“Ye’re glad to be home again, my little angelie? I’m sure I’m right glad.”

“Why do you call me that?—yon’s a new name,” she said quickly. “You never called me that before.”

“Did I no? do ye no like it?”

“It’s what you say when folks are dead, is’t no?”

"Maybe, pettie—I'm sure I never gave it a thought." And then, as he still stood looking down on her, she said, "Bow down till I speak to ye."

He obeyed. And Katie taking the fronts of his coat by her two hands whispered, "It's not *nice*, Dada, to want my leg. I don't like it."

"I believe that, my darlin'. I'd willingly take the trouble for ye myself, if I could. But ye'll maybe grow accustomed, in a whilie, and win back to your crutches. And ye mind, pettie, what Mr. Fyffe aye told us we must say, when things were hard to bear?"

"Yes, yes, I mind, Dada—'Thy Will be done.' I do say it. I was sayin' it to myself all the way out, in the train. I'm not to complain—only ye know I was just needin' to *tell you*."

"God bless you and help you, my own lamb!" And in the fulness of the kiss and the blessing Katie surely missed nothing of a mother's tenderness!

CHAPTER XXXI.

KATIE'S DREAM.

WEEKS and months passed by, and Jeanie seemed to have fallen into her old place in the little household at Abermurchie, where everything went on as formerly. There was an indefinable sense of something changed about it, however. And that there was a change in little Katie, the central object of affection and thought, her three guardians became very soon aware. She did not appear to suffer pain, or from any definite disease, now; but she was quieter, graver, more subdued: there was none of the old anxiety to get on, which she formerly displayed. She was coaxed and encouraged to try the use of her crutches; but she did so with evident effort and reluctance, and with great subsequent fatigue. She did not seem to care for being "hurled" in her little carriage, in the open air; and if she took up any of her favourite pieces of fancy-work, they were soon put down again, as if it tired her to go on. Dr. Spence said there was nothing to be done for her but to try and get up her strength, and to protect her from cold; it was too late in the year safely to go away for

unge. And Katie herself said she didn't want to go any anywhere again: though she often talked with Janie about the farm life and her four-footed or biped friends at Craigendykes.

If her father had been devoted to her before, his attention and devotion seemed now increased tenfold. He was never willingly absent from her side; he would run home three or four times in the day from his office to see how his pet was keeping; and the only fresh air he would allow himself was at his house-door of an afternoon when he could coax her to let him set her easy chair on the doorstep, in the sun. But it was growing cold and late for even this now.

He spared no expense or trouble to gratify any whim or fancy she might express: though in truth Katie had not many of these, being wonderfully contented as a child. The most often-repeated desire which she did express was for a doggie of her own, like the young minister's Nell; and Leslie accordingly wrote up to his dear uncle, to enquire whether there were any pups for disposal, in the Kessachie kennels. To which he received in return a pressing invitation from the old man to come and pay them a visit, and see for himself.

Leslie thought he might as well accept. His mother was delighted at the idea of his going there, and bringing her news of her old home and the relations whom for so many years she had not seen: so he started off the next day, telling Jeanie that he should certainly call for Aunt Elsie, and try to see Helen.

Leslie came back after one night's absence, bringing with him the funniest little shaggy bundle of a pup just old enough to shift for itself: a relation of Nell though not quite of the same breed, which was valuable; whereas this little beast, being of a more mongrel description, was disposed of by the keeper at a very moderate price, but would answer Katie's purpose of a pet and plaything as well as the best. Katie's delight was unbounded, and the new favourite promised to supply her with plenty of amusement, for he was of the mischievous playful age, and infinitely droll.

Leslie said the Kessachie folk were all full of the coming marriage of "the youngest missie"—"with yon clergyman cousin, just as I told ye," said the shrewd man. "I saw as plain as could be that those two were sweethearts, when we were at Stralogie."

"Dear me, and will they stop down near my mother's still?" asked Jeanie.

"Well, I would suppose so. He's to go south for his ordination in Advent, so I hear, and a *locum tenens* takes the duty over Christmas; and the wedding's to be just immediately after at Stra'kessachie's London house, and syne I suppose he would need to come back at once to his church."

Leslie seemed gratified also, on the whole, with his visit to the manse. "Yes, I saw the most of them," he said. "Eh, what a pretty woman Elsie Ledingham is still, and what a three fine girls she has growin' up! I didn't see the boy. Yon Argo's a curious creature,

certainly, but I'll not say but he was very civil to me, and showed me over all his place—and a right bit of a audin' he's got, though he doesn't keep it as well's he might."

"How was Nellie?" asked Jeanie, eagerly.

"Well, to say the truth, I canna say very much about Nellie; for whatever's the cause of it she's taken such an avoidance of me that she'll hardly give me a look out of her eyes or a finger of her hand. She just came once while I was there, and asked for yourself, Jeanie, and 'Aunt Peter' as she says; and syne she went out and I saw no more of her. I wouldn't have said she was looking just terrible well—unco grave she was, and white-like."

"Poor Nellie! I doubt she works too hard," said the compassionate Jeanie.

"Were you ever considered like your Aunt Elsie, my dear?" Leslie asked her a little later.

"I don't know; unless it be that I've her colour of hair," Jeanie answered simply.

"No, that's just what ye haven't, lassie. Yours is earer red, where hers is golden. But ye've a look of her, now and again—I couldn't say in any one particular, but I do see it at a time." And Jeanie smiled demurely, rather gratified at the comparison.

Jeanie had become almost as constant in her visits to Agnes Robbie in these days as last year. Agnes had received her back with open arms; having quite come to see that Jeanie was in no way whatever to blame

for her brother's trespass and flight. Jeanie thought her looking very ill and altered, when they met again. She had evidently been fretting and pining for her brother, and feeling sadly the anxiety and doubt respecting his present career; and it was comforting to share her trouble with the sisterly friend who could best sympathize with her. Agnes did not bear up so well as Jeanie. She tried to be patient and resigned: she was really a good and religious girl; but her religion was of a gloomier sort than Jeanie's. She lacked besides that child-like simple living faith which gave Jeanie's character its strength and solidity, and made their intercourse a real tonic medicine to Agnes's fainting heart.

But with all her brave faith and cheerfulness, poor Jeanie had many a heart-ache of her own; and those shortening winter days and lengthening nights brought sad memories of the previous year, associated as they were with her time of happy hopefulness and love. She fancied that Katie sometimes felt those associations too, and pined a little for the young uncle whose visits had formerly done so much to brighten her life. He was a forbidden subject of conversation too. Once, and once only, in a weary moment Katie had unwarily given expression to the wish that "poor Uncle Jock was home, to come and play to her;" but the name had brought such a sad look to Jeanie's face that it was never repeated.

But one night when all had retired to rest, Jeanie

was roused by Katie starting up in her sleep with a sudden sobbing cry, "Uncle Jock!"

Jeanie was at her side in an instant. "What is it, my darling?"

"Uncle Jock," she repeated. "Did ye see him?"

"Ye had been dreaming about him," Jeanie said. "Don't cry, darling—lie ye down."

"I don't think I was sleepin', Jeanie. I saw him lookin' oh, so bad—so white-like and sad. I'm frightened, Jeanie," and she went on sobbing.

Jeanie felt a chill run through her, and the tears started to her eyes. But she forced herself to be calm; she insisted that Katie must have been dreaming. "Ye've lien wrong, maybe, and given yerself a nasty wuff" (start). "Let me sort up your pillows and lie down again."

But Katie would not be pacified for some time. Rather, she went on with words that wrung poor Jeanie's heart. "He looked so sad-like, Do you think he's dead now, Jeanie, and sorry that he took poor Dada's money? 'Cause he couldn't be happy-like, 'less be that he was sorry."

"We must leave him in the Lord's Hand, my dearie. We can say our prayers for him, ye know—we always do, don't we?"

"I know Dada does," said Katie, wisely. "And don't you know what the Book says about the prayer of a righteous man? I think Dada's a righteous man, don't you?"

"Yes, dear. I think poor uncle has a great many prayers. So we mustn't fret too sore."

"Mightn't we pray for him *now*, Jeanie—though *is* at night—you and me?"

"Yes. But if I say a prayer, you'll promise me *ye* lie down after and sleep, like a good girlie? or *ye* have yerself ill."

So in the dim gas-light—for there was always a tiny jet kept burning all night where Katie slept—Jeanie knelt up, and with her arm round the sobbing and trembling child, said the prayer that was always nearest her heart—in what words she scarcely knew, but they were simple and true, and expressed the meaning of both; and then the two repeated together *the* Prayer that, of all others, bends itself to every need and occasion. And then Katie seemed satisfied and lay down again. Long before poor Jeanie had closed an eye she had dropped off into the peaceful slumber of childhood; only every now and then still sobbing a little in her sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWO LETTERS.

JEANIE could not seem to shake off the impression of Katie's dream next morning. Perhaps because she had slept but little after that arousing : whereas Katie's own agitation had wearied her into sounder slumbers, and she woke up just as usual when the ordinary time came. But she said nothing more even to Jeanie about her fancy, and their conversation ; nor did Jeanie mention it to any one. She had thought at first of telling Agnes ; but with a tact often wanting to her age and class she refrained, being convinced on reflection that it would only distress Agnes needlessly.

But for that day, and for several days, Jeanie went about with the strong impression that she was going to hear something of Jock. Every post that came in, every letter that she saw in Leslie's hand, made her heart throb with expectation ; but as days and weeks passed on, and no fulfilment came, Jeanie began gradually to cease to think about it more than usual, and the impression to wear off.

The Advent season was now drawing on to Christmas. Jeanie had heard from her mother that the young minister had gone to England for his ordination and was not to return till the middle of January, when it was supposed he would bring a wife with him.

One evening they were sitting round the fire reading letters by the last mail. Leslie had several as usual; and one had been given to Jeanie, in her eldest sister's hand, which soon rivetted her entire attention.

"MY DEAR JEANIE,

"I write to let you know that I have accepted an offer of marriage from Mr. Andrew Grant, who is at present station agent at Monthoolie. Mother entirely approves of the match, and I believe that I have every prospect of a comfortable home with him."

"With love, your affectionate sister,

"H. LEDINGHAM."

It was not a long letter. But Helen's nature was to be reserved, on most occasions; and Jeanie, after she had taken in the contents, looked up at her companions with a beaming face. "Aunt Annie! Leslie! what do ye think I've heard from Nellie, no'?"

But looking up, she saw Leslie poring over one of his letters—a long one, on a large thin sheet of paper—with such a grave, utterly absorbed, rather saddened face, that she was checked in the utterance of her

ger news. A sudden sense of apprehension came over her, and with it the absolute certainty that some tidings of the lost one had come at last: even before Leslie looked up slowly and met her devouring eyes with the same sad face, and a sort of sigh and headache. "Yes, my dear. Mother—yon's a letter"—but he seemed afraid to say more.

"Uncle Jock—it's fro' Uncle Jock," said Katie, sitting straight up in her cushioned chair; uttering the thought that was unspoken in Jeanie's heart.

"It's about poor Uncle Jock, my lamb—no from himself."

"And where—where is he then?—coming?"

Leslie went up to the child, and bent over her. "Ye'll not grieve yourself too sore, my pet. Poor Uncle Jock's not to come home to us any more—please God, he's *better*."

"Is he—is he—" the words trembled on Katie's lip, and poor Jeanie's sorrowful voice here broke in: "Eh! I knew—I *knew* we were to hear it! Oh! Katie, your dream!" And then she burst into sobs for a few minutes, looking up almost immediately to say: "How—where—oh, tell me, Leslie!"

Poor Leslie for once in his life hesitated, hardly able to face Jeanie's appealing eyes and sad countenance. "I can hardly tell ye where," he said at length. "This letter is from some sort of a minister, he calls himself, but I don't know of what body—and the place—I don't rightly make it out, but the post-town has been New

York, whatever—this seems like as though it was out in the country.”

“Couldn’t ye read us the letter, Leslie?” said Grannie, “and then we’d both hear, like, at once.”

“Well, come ben the house, then—Baubie!” (to the servant) “stop you in here with Katie—we’ll be back in a little, my pet. I’m not willin’ to leave her,” he added half to himself, for Katie was crying quietly but bitterly.

“Dada,” she whispered, as he stood reluctant by her side, “tell me—was Uncle Jock *good*—had he been sorry that he was bad?”

“Yes, pettie. I think he had.”

“He had *repented*?”

“I believe in my heart he had!”

“And was forgiven syne?”

“I trust so—in the Lord’s mercy.”

“Had he—had he a *right* minister to him?” said this loyal little daughter of the Church. “Ye said it was a minister wrote.”

“I don’t know whatten a minister he is, lammie. But he’s been a good Christian man, I doubt, and done what he could for him, poor lad!”

“I wish Mr. Fyffe had been wi’ him,” Katie whispered.

“Ay. Mr. Fyffe would be a comfort to any. But ye know the Lord can speak to folk His own way—He doesn’t need the best of his servants, if He please. And now, my little lassie, ye’ll leave cryin’, won’t ye?—and stop a wee minutie with Baubie, as long’s I would read the letter to Grannie and poor Jeanie.”

He kissed her, and hastened to the opposite apartment, whither Jeanie and Grannie had preceded him. Grannie stood beside him, listening with eyes and ears, and Jeanie, sitting on a low stool covered her face with her hands, as Leslie cleared his throat and stood under the gas-jet to read :

“DEAR SIR,

“I take the liberty of writing to you, although an entire stranger, at the request of a young man who has just died here in great poverty of circumstances ; from whom I received your name and address. He gave me his own name as John Robb, or Robbie—I am not certain which; stating that he was a native of the north of Scotland, and that you were his sister’s husband. I could begin by mentioning that I met with him, mainly speaking, by the merest chance. Visiting the poorer members of my flock, I was requested by an old woman who has let a very humble class of lodgings, to look in upon the poor young stranger who had been left at her house by his travelling-companions day or two ago, to die. I acceded to her request, and found on a poor pallet a young man about three or four and twenty, apparently in the last stage of pulmonary disease. He was exceedingly poverty-stricken, but from his appearance I should have judged him to have known better days, if he had not himself told me so. When I asked in what way I could assist him, and told him that I was a minister of religion, he gasped forth a request that I would ‘write home’—and then gave your name and address as the person with whom he wished me to communicate. He said that you were the kindest friend

he had had, all his life—that his own brother, who lived in New York, had cast him off and refused to help him, but that he could trust you still, and that you would tell his mother and sister. Then he tried with great effort to make a disclosure to me, of a very painful nature. He said that he had requited your kindness by cheating and robbing you to a large extent: that he was most sincerely penitent, and had been desirous of making restitution if he had been able; but that from the moment he left Scotland with your money, everything had seemed to go wrong with him. He had tried one thing after another and failed; and he confessed that he had fallen lower and lower into drinking habits, and had ruined both his health and his fortune. He could not tell me all the details; and from his extreme weakness, the fearful oppression on his breath, as well as a strong Scotch accent, I had much difficulty in understanding all that he said. As far as I could understand it, it appears that being left nearly destitute, he had joined company with a band of itinerant musicians, and shared their livelihood by playing the flute. After a short time his health broke down altogether, and he could neither play nor follow his companions, who left him behind with his flute, his few clothes, and a coin or two. I did what I could for his spiritual comfort, his bodily condition was beyond human aid; and having undertaken to follow his directions I left him, promising to call next day; but on my return found that the poor fellow had died in the night. I have arranged for his decent interment, and lose no time in addressing myself to you, hoping that I may be correct in doing so. The enclosed small packet was

ound on his person after death, and I enclose it, in case it may be of interest to friends: though I trust it is not needed to vouch for the correctness of this statement.

"I beg to subscribe myself, Sir,

"Yours obediently,

"ANDREW J. WHITEHEAD,

"Minister of Religion."

To Leslie Esslemont, Esquire,
Abermurchie, Scotland."

Leslie drew a long sigh when he finished the letter.

"Eh! poor fellow, to think of his fallin' so low," Grannie said softly. But Jeanie still sat in the same position, her hands pressed almost into her eyes, her frame shaken by sobs.

"Lassie, lassie, look up, there's a dear," Mrs. Peter said. "We canna help it the noo. Please God, he's found peace, poor lost creature! Yon's been a good man, that's written ye, Leslie."

"Ay. Look ye, see here, Jeanie, my dear. This is the packetie—maybe ye'll like to see what it is."

Jeanie looked up to take from his hand a little worn half-crumpled yellow-looking paper packet. Outside was written "J. L. to J. R." and a date—little more than a year ago. Inside, as Jeanie with trembling fingers unfolded it, she beheld one of her own honest red-brown locks of hair.

"Oh!" she cried, sinking down in an agony of grief, Oh! if I had only gone with him!"

They tried in vain, with gentlest words, to console her; but poor Jeanie could not listen then. Instead, she shook herself free of her aunt in helpless misery, and ran up in the dark to the old attic. There, alone, she flung herself on her knees by the bed, sobbing wildly and bitterly. All the unkindness, the shallowness, the selfishness, and the subsequent transgressions of poor Jock Robbie were forgotten now: she only thought of him as her one, her first love, who had suffered so sadly and died in a strange land among strangers, and who had carried about him to the last this frail token which, after all, showed that he had not in thought altogether cast her off. She forgot too even what her own circumstances had been; and in her grief at the thought of his desolation and suffering, reproached herself as though it had been her own selfish shrinking from the home partings and the new country which had withheld her from accompanying him at all risks. And she was sensible now, how that she had never in the depth of her heart lost hold of the hope that one day—after many years it might be, but still that one day—he would return, repentant and forgiven, and that finding her still true there might be reconciliation, and happiness for both. But it was all at an end now. He had sunk lower and lower, and died miserably and alone: leaving her just the gleam of hope, the blessed gleam for which in her sore grief she yet thanked God, that he had had a little space for repentance.

Leslie and his mother were both sadly grieved for

Janie, but the old lady wisely forbore following her upstairs now. "She'll just need to be let be, poor lassie," she said. "She'll be better for havin' a good rest her lone."

"Ay. It has gone deep with her, poor thing. Well, now I'll need to see Mrs. Robbie and Agnes. It'll be a right sore tidings to them."

"Deed will it, Leslie. Ye've aye the ill news to bear, poor fella," she added tenderly; "but I doubt there's few could break it so canny and kind's yerself."

"I'm all that's to do it, whatever," said Leslie with a signed sigh, as he buttoned his coat over his broad chest, and set off on his melancholy errand.

It was late when he came back. Poor Jeanie had crept down-stairs again, and was sitting by Katie, her nearest comforter after all; and she had recovered herself sufficiently to look up with deep interest and sympathy at the state of the poor mother and sister, as Aunt Annie asked how they bore the news.

"Mrs. Robbie's in an awful state," Leslie said. "I never saw a woman so upset. Agnes is quiet—just what ye would imagine—but I doubt it'll be as sore upon her in the end. She's askin' for you, Jeanie, my dear—how ye are, and so on."

"Will I go to her?" asked Jeanie, starting up.

"Well, I wouldn't say ye should go the night. The morn maybe, ye'll be able to do them some good."

It was a strange solemn evening to the four. Leslie

was very grave and silent, *his* way of showing sorrow; and his mother was full of sympathy for all, though personally the grief could not be so great to her. Katie had ceased her tears, but was quiet and subdued and awe-struck by the new atmosphere which had fallen on their peaceful home. Jeanie had grown calm also; and as usual, after the first violence of sorrow had spent itself, was already beginning to lose herself in thought for others.

But it was not till the next morning that the sight of Helen's letter reminded her of the announcement it had brought. "How selfish of me to forget about poor Nellie!" she thought. "I'll need to write off to her at once. I mind upon her speaking of a Mr. Grant, but he didn't seem altogether what she would have liked. But I've no doubt she's made a real good choice, she's so wise and superior and clever—I hope he'll appreciate her." And with a sigh for her own vanished hopes and lost love, poor Jeanie set herself with what heart she might to answer her sister's letter by the first post.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KATIE'S ADVICE.

THAT Christmas was a very sad and quiet one to the members of Provost Esslemont's household. But they settled to their usual routine of life after the melancholy tidings which had come upon them so suddenly, it seemed, to the three elder at any rate, as a deeper and darker shadow were gradually spreading and settling down over their peaceful circle. For the weeks went on it became only too evident to those who watched her that little Katie was fading away. There was nothing sudden, nothing tangible about her ailment. But she declined almost visibly; giving up by degrees one thing after another, and seeming quite contented to lie still on her sofa—everything else made her so tired, she said. She seemed to be in a sort of waste, though she had no pain, no cough, no sickness that could be treated. Dr. Spence prescribed port-wine and tonics and every nourishing food and drink that could be procured; but it was not easy to rouse her appetite. At length he told her father that there was nothing more that could be done for her:

she had no disease, but her system was unable apparently to rally from the shock which it had received, and she would probably sink gradually, without suffering pain.

Poor Leslie bore the telling very meekly and calmly, saying that he had known it all along. In fact the blow was struck, for him, when she went into the hospital: he said himself that he felt he was signing her death-warrant when he gave his consent to that. But Dr. Spence assured him for his comfort that the alternative would only have been more certainly fatal—with greatly-increased suffering.

What poor little Katie herself thought no one knew. Nothing had been said to her directly, about her state; they did not wish to discourage her as long as a shadow of hope remained—and as for Grannie Robbie's and Agnes's lamentations, and observations that "she looked worse and worse ilka time," Katie was used to being moaned over by them from her cradle, so she never seemed to heed them. She was not restless and eager as formerly: she was patient and contented as long as they let her be quiet; and only fretted when urged to sit up, or to try to walk, or to eat more. And when he saw that it was of no use, Leslie would not allow her to be troubled.

One Sunday forenoon her father was staying at home with her as he constantly did now; and she was lying across his knees at the fireside, for she felt the cold very much, wrap her up as they might. She had

en so lying for some time: they had not been speaking much; when Katie suddenly put up her hand and touched his face and beard. "Poor old Dada! must leave ye? What will ye do when I'm away?"

"God knows, my pet," he said in a low voice of tense feeling. He never liked to look forward.

"Ye'll be some lonesome, I doubt?"

"Ay will I," pressing his arms closer round her.

"Dada," after a little pause, "I tell ye what. I think ye should just marry Jeanie—after I'm away, ye know," she added, explicitly.

"Hoot-toots, little wifie! ye don't know what ye're eakin' about."

"Ye're no angry, Dada? Ye know, Miss Spence aye tells a cryin' about ye, wi' Grannie. She was in a two rights ago. And she always goes on—just as she ought I was asleep—or *stupid*," said Katie. "She told a lot about me, and that—but I don't *care*, ye know, Dada. I know I'll not stop with ye much longer. And she says ye're such a fine man, ye know, and that's Grannie's duty to make ye take a wife to yourself. I'll not take Miss Spence, will ye?"

"Heaven forbid."

"I wouldn't like ye should marry Miss Spence. And see there's only Jeanie—and I love Jeanie, don't ye?"

"The only woman in the world, is she?" said Leslie with a little laugh in spite of himself. "But if I don't want any one, what then?"

"Ye do love Jeanie, don't ye? *I* do"—as if that were conclusive. "I think she would be kind to ye, and hold ye from frettin' about me."

"Ay, Jeanie's a good lass," he said, with a little sigh. "But she's no for the like of a sober old fella like myself. More than that, I doubt Jeanie's heart is buried in poor Uncle Jock's grave, in the meantime. By-and-by, when she grows better, she'll meet with her match—some nice young lad of her own age, who'll be worthy of her. I hope so."

Katie remained silent a little. And presently he added: "Ye mind—ye'll not speak o' such things to Jeanie—at *any* time, pettie?"

"Eh no. Not if you're no for her. Ye know she might get a broken heart. Can folks get a broken heart *twice*?" looking up.

"Deed I couldn't say, pettie."

"Grannie said once her heart was near broken when poor Jockie was bad and went off. Eh, what sore it must be to get a broken heart! Dada, whiles I think I'm glad I'll no grow up to a woman, so as I'll never get a broken heart!"

"Awat ye've had *your* share of what's sore, my lammie!"

"Eh ay, I've had my leg and that—but that's only my little cross, what Mr. Fyffe says. I think it's no so bad as a broken heart."

"I doubt ye're right there, child," he said with a deep sigh.

'Dada," she said after another little silence of king into the fire. "One thing. I would like to see the Sacrament with you before I go away. Mr. Fyffe could give it us here—like he did you once when you were lyin'."

"Yes, my dear. But ye're so young—and no confirmed."

"Ay. But the Prayer-book says, ye know—"

"I know. I don't see myself what would hinder ye. But we'll ask Mr. Fyffe, pettie—we'll ask Mr. Fyffe."

They did not talk much after that. And Grannie and Jeanie coming home from their morning service and the two just in the same position: each calm and quiet and apparently happy. Jeanie little guessed on that deep subjects they had been speaking.

A few days afterwards, Jeanie, going to answer a knock at the door, confronted the handsome dark eyes of her brother Peter.

"Eh, Patie, it's you!" she cried in pleasant surprise.

"Hoo are ye, Jeanie? Esslemont in?"

"Not the noo. He'll be, though. Come your ways in."

She took him first into the kitchen, where they were sitting themselves.

"I came, partly to see him," Peter said; "and whether thought ye'd be ill about hearing o' Nellie—couldn't get written to ye."

"Eh yes. Is't all settled when the marriage is decided?"

“Marriage! Had ye no heard then? I thought surely Aunt Elsie—no, there’s not like to be much word o’ marriage for her, poor creature. She was so unwell last week mother had to go up and fetch her home, and she’s still lyin,’ and terrible bad-like.”

“Eh, ye dinna say!” cried poor Jeanie. “What’s ado with her, then?”

“Well, I don’t rightly know, nor does the doctors. It be to have been comin’ on this while, but yon night the bonfires was, for the Kessachie marriage, she’d gone out amo’ the hills some way, and she be to have taken the cold, and they’re frightened for rheumatism fever. She’s been gey strange, and off her head at a time—and whiles she says she’ll no be married at all, or have a word to say to the man. I’m real sorry for him, poor fella. He was over one day to ask for her, and awfully bad-like, about it. He’s a real good-hearted chappie—some old and sober-kind, for the like o’ Nellie—but terribly fond o’ her.”

“Eh! me, what a lot of trouble!” cried poor Jeanie, sinking down by the table, and bursting into tears. “I think there’s nothing else but trouble in the world!”

“Poor lassie! I’m sorry it’s come so sudden upon ye. But she’ll maybe win through, I’m not sayin’.”

“Eh! I hope so, I hope so! I would like home to see her, but you see I can’t win. Our poor wee thingie here is real unwell, Patie.”

“Is she? Not worse?”

“Eh, yes. Eh, she’ll not be long, I don’t think.

e's that weary. And some days she'll not let us take out over her bed. And she's grown so wise-like, just as a grown woman, ye know, and ye wouldn't believe the things she says! I don't know what's to become of my father when she's taken," she added in a whisper. "I think he grows fonder of her every day."

'Will he be in soon? for I must be away by the 10. I think I'll just better go over to his office. Thanks, no; I'm not for anything to eat. I don't mind telling ye I'm come to answer his advertisement for book-keeper."

'Eh, ye are! That would be real nice, Patie."

'I think it would just suit me," said Patie. "I don't care much about where I am at present, and I might of a change whatever—and then when I saw his advertisement, I thought I would come and see him at once. He told me in the summer-time he'd be glad to do what he could for me any time, but he'd fill vacancies himself then."

'I'm sure he'll be glad. I know it was a trouble to him Shand leavin', that's been so long with him—and ye see he's setting up in another line. Well, I'll detain ye then, as the time's pressing. Good-bye, my dear, and oh, do bid Lizzie send me a line about Mr Nellie."

'All right, Jeanie. Keep up your heart, and maybe it won't be as bad's we think."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO KESSACHIE WEDDINGS.

POOR Helen Ledingham was very ill.

The discovery of the futility of her hopes with regard to the young clergyman had been a great shock to her, the more so as her feelings had been so entirely repressed. She had borne it at first with a kind of stoical outward indifference, relying upon her proper pride and self-respect to uphold her therein. But there had been no real resignation, no loving surrender (as in the case of her "childish" sister Jeanie) of her own to a Higher Will, in the faith that what was ordered was best for her. And proper pride and self-respect, though all very well in their way, are but poor crutches to lean on with no better support behind. And so the strong pressure put upon her feelings made her only outwardly severe, and cold, and petulant with her companions; while the wound thus salved over, rankled deeper within.

Then some of her Sunday journeys threw her again into the society of Mr. Andrew Grant. And she no

longer avoided him as before; rather, out of a kind of contradiction, she talked to him even sociably and pleasantly. The honest man needed no encouragement to renew his own unsuccessful suit; and pressed it with such earnestness that Helen, without thinking, or caring very much for the issue, accepted him as has been seen, with very little ado. To say the truth, she was in that frame of mind that she would have walked over a precipice with very little persuasion; and having accepted Andrew Grant, and ascertained that her mother and friends were quite favourable to the match, she went on in a matter-of-fact sort of way with her preparations, but showed neither pleasure nor interest in her prospects.

Mrs. Argo observed that she grew paler and thinner, more stern and reserved in her manner; and Mr. Argo even was rather struck by her demeanour, and remarked once or twice to his wife that Helenie did not look terrible happy over her engagement. Poor Mr. Argo had quite ceased to banter her after the terrible lesson she had given him on that unhappy day in the summer; though he felt a little sore on the subject, since he had not been without his aspirations that his niece's good looks and talents might have won her a higher match than that which she was actually to make.

Then had come the news of the wedding of the youngest daughter of the house of Strathkessachie, far away in London. There were feastings of tenantry

and dependents, rejoicing and health-drinking, toasts and speeches. And the minister of Kessachie forgot his disappointed aspirations in the important part played by him on these festal occasions. Very flowery were his speeches, as recorded in the local prints—in which he spoke of the bride as the “white rose of Kessachie,” and expressed his hope that as her husband had found a charge in the same county her presence might still often gladden her native hills and glens. On the wedding night the Kessachie hills were to be ablaze with bonfires; and all the young Argos were wild to go out and see them. Aunt Elsie was too delicate to venture out so late at night, but the indefatigable Mr. Argo took all but the baby out to an open spot on the moss, and Helen at her aunt’s desire went with them. She had steeled herself to go; and after her uncle and the young ones even had enough of it, Helen still lingered, pacing restlessly about, till thoroughly tired and chilled she was obliged to come in. Next day she seemed to have taken a violent chill: she insisted on rising, but could only sit shivering over the fire; and that night her sleeping companion, Sophy, went to her mother terribly frightened because Helen would not go to sleep and was “talking so strange-like.” Mrs. Argo was hardly less frightened than her daughter, and sent for her sister as soon as could be. Margaret was not able to remain away from her younger children, and Mrs. Argo was not strong enough to undertake the nursing of Helen herself; so with the doctor’s permission,

The weather was temperate, Margaret and Sandy visited the poor girl to her home.

Here she took to her bed and lay for several weeks. Her illness did not actually amount to rheumatic fever, but she had a very severe chill besides a good deal of nervous disturbance, and the doctor was of opinion that the disorder had been coming on for some time.

She was quite delirious at times, talking about the past, which seemed to haunt her; and let fall some remarks now and then which made her mother think that she had had some previous disappointment or trouble, in which Margaret was never fully able to understand what it had been.

Her poor lover was in deep grief and anxiety; but he was so anxious, though he had twice been over to enquire, that he would not be persuaded to see him or send him a message, even after she had become convalescent; and her state of mind was very trying as well as puzzling to her mother. The marriage was originally to have taken place in January; but Helen obstinately avoided the subject, and it seemed now as though it must be postponed indefinitely.

Mr. and Mrs. Penreath, who had come home to their parsonage, called soon after at Craighendykes. Mr. Penreath had no intention of seeing them; but it was so late that she was up and dressed, sitting in the parlour, and a servant-lass who happened to go to the door showed her straight in; so that she could not avoid them. Mr. Penreath was very pleasant and friendly in manner

evidently intending to be kind. She had improved somewhat, and showed none of that cool haughtiness which she used formerly to affect. Horace was much as usual, perhaps rather shy, and left his wife to do most of the talking.

Helen bore the surprise well; but she was very pale and silent, only giving monosyllabic replies to Mrs. Penreath's attempts at friendliness. The young couple felt compassion for her changed looks and evident delicacy, though they little suspected its cause; and left expressing their hope that she would soon regain her strength.

Strange as it may seem, that visit did Helen good. She would never have sought the interview; but coming unavoidably, it got over the first and the worst of the trial, and helped her to realize the futility of her past misplaced affection. From that day she appeared to rally; and the next time that Andrew Grant managed to get a day's leave to come over to Deeside, she received his visit in good part.

They had a long talk alone together. What passed between them none but themselves knew; but after he was gone Helen told her mother that they had arranged everything; and in three weeks' time—just before the beginning of a late Lent—they were to be married.

One point Helen laid down, and stuck to, though her mother and brother were surprised and disappointed thereat. She would on no account be married at home

her at the Glendinnie chapel or her mother's house. She did not wish to give her Aunt Argo the trouble and fuss of a wedding either; but she arranged with the old Esslemonts that she was to go to them, for one night only, and be married quite quietly at their house, Mr. Davidson; as the Whinnymuir church was so far off, and she was still, though recovered, far from strong.

So at the lodge of Kessachie, with her brother Peter give her away—for Sandy was offended and would not—and only Elsie and Maggie Argo for her “maids” Helen Ledingham took the worthy station-agent for better, for worse: and the newly-wedded pair went straight home to their little house at Monthoolie: a small little home enough, with its creeper-garlanded walls, and the snug bit of garden, a very blaze of colour in summer and autumn, for Andrew was a bit of a artist, and loved to give his spare hours to its culture. Surely and dull some might call the spot, but at any rate the air was pure from the purple moorlands which surrounded the view; and the whistle and rattle of the better, slow-and-steady trains, came ever and anon to remind the dwellers there that they were not cut off from the busy stirring world altogether. In such a home, and with an honest steady godly man like its master for her partner, it will surely be Helen's own fault if she be not happy at last.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE END OF THE CHARGE.

JEANIE was not able to go to her sister's wedding. As it had not taken place at home, there might have been difficulties in the way of this at any rate; but even had it been otherwise, Jeanie could not and would not have left her little invalid cousin, even for part of a day.

For at the beginning of February, just as Helen was turning the corner of her illness, poor little Katie took to her bed, not to leave it again—except occasionally when the fancy took her of lying on her father's knees at the fire, rolled in a blanket. She had become so weak that the fatigue of even a partial dressing was too great; and it was impossible to keep her warm long when she was up; so that bed was the best place for her.

Jeanie had one pleasure in the midst of her anxious nursing, in that her brother Peter obtained the situation in Leslie's office on which his heart was set. Leslie found a good lodging for him, and he often spent his evenings with them, unless he were out practising athletics—a passion for which Leslie was not inclined to be hard upon him; as it gave him air and exercise and

ally occupation in his leisure time. Peter was a steady clever accountant. Further, being musically inclined like many of his family, he asked to join Mr. Fyffe's choir; and comported himself therein and in other respects in a manner quite creditable to the house of Ledingham.

The neighbours were all very kind and sympathizing about little Katie. As for poor Miss Spence, she came every day and several times in a day, bringing fruit and flowers, books and pictures, everything that her fertile imagination could suggest and her limited means procure. But books and pictures were of little use to Katie now. She sought neither for occupation nor amusement, but was content to lie still hour after hour, with Jeanie or her grandmother beside her—unless "Dada" were at home—and perhaps little Kessachie the terrier pup in her arms or at her feet. She seldom made a complaint, except that she was "so tired"—probably the expression of her increasing weakness.

Mr. and Mrs. Fyffe were constant in their attention, and were a great stay and comfort to all the four during those days of gathering gloom and anxiety. Mr. Fyffe had been exceedingly kind to Jeanie at the time of her own trouble, and she had learned to look upon him as a friend whom she might freely consult and to whom she might safely confide. He himself felt great esteem for Jeanie, whose simplicity, candour, and childlike faith impressed him strongly, as well as her loving devotion to her little invalid charge. To Katie,

as to them all, Mr. Fyffe was all that any one could be either as pastor or as friend. Katie had always been fond of him ; and now his visits cheered her as nothing else—except the company of her father—did. And she was allowed the fulfilment of her one great wish. After one or two loving preparatory talks in which he was fully assured of her due fitness for the holy rite, the friend and pastor of her childhood, who had baptized her in her infancy, administered to her in company with her father, Grannie, and Jeanie, her first and last Communion.

From that day she seemed visibly to decline, and would lie for hours apparently unconscious, her mind often wandering when she was aroused ; but she always knew her father—the large strong man with the noiseless tread and gentle voice ; and had a smile for him come when he might.

Not even he could wish to keep her, when every additional day brought additional weakness with its consequent suffering ; and as her appetite now failed entirely, there was no possibility of keeping up the little strength that remained. They never left her by day or night. Leslie and Jeanie divided the night watches between them entirely ; for poor Grannie could not trust her ears, and was apt to get drowsy if she sat up at night, though by day she was unremitting.

February had glided into March before their watch was over. One night—or rather very early one morning—Leslie, having lain down in his clothes for a short interval of needful rest, was aroused by a hand on his shoulder,

and looked up to see Jeanie's face white and scared in the faint gaslight. "Come to her, Leslie—at once, hist ye!" and she had flown back to her post. He knew what the summons meant, poor fellow, only too well, as he followed her, in a few rapid steps, to the child's bedside.

The end was surely very near, for she did not know even him. But he was in time to take her in his arms once more, to lay her head on his breast, and to believe that in the well-known support and embrace there was a gleam of relief. Grannie had come in also, and stood sadly and helplessly watching. Jeanie had sunk on her knees by the bedside, pressing her hands over her face: she could not bear to look up. But there was nothing to shock or pain, beyond the natural awe inseparable from any death-scene, as in those strong tender arms that had been her refuge all her motherless life, on that kind bosom where most of her childish griefs had been wept out, little Katie drew her last sigh—going, we may well believe, from that great earthly love to the fuller knowledge of the infinite Father-love of which the purest of earth's affections is but the faint type and shadow.

Leslie held her in his arms for fully a minute after all was over, before he laid down the frail burden and closed the clear eyes and pressed a long kiss on the chill brow. Then, leaving the women to do their part, the childless widower rose up and went silently back to his own room, shutting the door behind him.

Into the greatness of that grief let no one dare to intrude.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JEANIE'S DISMISSAL.

WHAT a strange and sad awaking it was for Jeanie next morning!

When their mournful task was over, Grannie had taken her up to the attic and made her lie down in her own bed. And being thoroughly tired, and of an age to sleep for sorrow, Jeanie had fallen asleep and slept far into the morning, only aroused at length by her great-aunt coming back to the room after she had been stirring for some time. Poor Jeanie started up self-reproachful. "Eh, what way have ye let me sleep in, Aunt Annie? I'm real sorry."

"Never mind, my dear," answered Mrs. Peter kindly. "Awat ye've had much need o' a rest, and ye're not needin' hurry yerself the noo."

"Have *you* rested any, Aunt Annie?"

"Eh ay. As much as I was needin'—I was ill about *him*, ye know, and not seekin' to lie long."

"How is he the morn?"

Aunt Annie shook her head sadly. "Awat he's right bad, poor man. It'll be a while or he comes

o' himsel'. I havena seen him so ill sin' he lost his wife, I sanna say. He hasna been to's bed. I know fine he was back to the room whenever we'd gone up the stair; and when I went down at the back o' six, I got him ben there kneelin' at her head, and ye'd have thought the very heart o' him was burstin'."

"Poor fellow," whispered Jeanie with tearful eyes. "Where is he now? I'm frightened he'll not like to see me."

"He's sittin' aside the fire in the kitchen—but just you go in and do your work and never tak' a bit nottice o' him. He'll have out to go after a while, and that'll help to take his mind off some."

So Jeanie did as she was told, and went about her duties silently; but her heart ached sorely for the poor stricken man sitting crouched down beside the fire in the very abstraction of grief. At length, as her avocations led her unavoidably to the fireside, he lifted up his head a little, saying in a husky whisper, "How are ye, Jeanie?"

"Thanks, I'm pretty well. How's yourself, Leslie?" Jeanie ventured timidly to ask. A mournful shake of the head was all answer, as he leant it down again upon his hands. But the first reserve had been broken through, notwithstanding.

After their silent breakfast, Leslie took up his hat to go out, with a quiet resolved look as if he had made up his mind to face his duty at once. "I'm glad he's made out to go," his mother remarked afterwards to Jeanie, "sin' it be to be done, and none but himself

to do it. And he's better out o' the road or the folk commence coming in."

Jeanie felt quite of the same mind when shortly after "the folk" did begin to come in, in the person of Grannie Robbie and Agnes in the first place, who called immediately on Leslie's announcement of what had taken place, and were very genuine in their lamentations and sympathy.

Then arrived poor Miss Spence, dissolved in floods of tears, to take a last fond look at "her little pet." Mrs. Robbie and Agnes were still there, when after the sad but soothing sight Miss Spence came back to the kitchen and sat down sobbing. "No, no, it's not for the dear precious little angel that I weep! *She* is far better! but the bereaved father—oh, Mrs. Peter, dear, what will he do, what *will* he do?" she kept on repeating.

It was rather trying both for Grannie and Jeanie. They were quite as well aware as Miss Spence that "he was so devoted—so wrapped up in her—she was his one thought, &c., &c.," but it was of no use reiterating the mournful facts now. Yet they could not but be sorry for Miss Spence, who had been really fond of the child, and whose sympathy, though so impulsive, was very true at the time.

They were quite afraid of Leslie returning and finding her still there. But he did not return till quite late in the evening, staying at his office all day, after his other duties were done. They of course entailed his calling on Mr. Fyffe; and this enforced visit did him

ore real good than anything else. Both Jeanie and her mother could well understand his shunning the sad return to them; whereas till now he had been in the habit of running over from his office a dozen times in a day to see his dying child. Sorrowful at heart as both of them were, they repressed as much as possible the outward display of it for his sake.

So the few sad days before the funeral passed. The evening before, Jeanie had stolen in to take a long farewell look at the little step-cousin who had become so dearly as dear to her as one of her own young sisters. She thought she had never seen anything so lovely as the form that lay there so peacefully; the beautiful child-face with its look of unutterable repose and hidden sadness, the fair hair falling around it, the little hands crossed meekly on the breast, and above them a cross of pure white flowers which Mrs. Fyffe had brought and placed there herself. Long and tenderly did Jeanie gaze—and with all her love, and spite of her own constant duties in the death-chamber, her soul was full of a great absorbing awe, as she thought of the mysterious change which had come over the child so lately from the lowest ebb of mortal weakness and suffering. What wondrous fulness of love and joy and knowledge had those few days brought to her little Katie?

“You can teach her nothing else—
She hath learned the mystery hid
Under Egypt's pyramid :
By those eyelids pale and close
Now she knows what Rhameses knows.”

Jeanie had knelt down beside the little coffin, when a gentle step behind her told her that she was not alone. Leslie had entered the room unperceived by her, and was now standing, gazing too at the empty casket which had held his treasure. Jeanie rose, and with a hasty "I beg your pardon!" would have passed out, but he stopped her. "Nay, my dear, why should ye go?" he asked quietly. "Surely ye've as good a right as any to be here."

He was quite calm and like his old self now, though through the past few days she had not heard him speak beyond what was absolutely necessary. "Isn't she right bonnie?" he asked presently; and as Jeanie stood silent he added: "Stay, you and me will have a prayer beside her once more."

He knelt down, and Jeanie beside him. He did not pray aloud, but she heard him go through, in an audible whisper, the last collect in the burial service. It was too much for poor Jeanie's composure then. Thoughts of Katie, of all that the loss must be to her father, and of that other one departed whose memory still lay so near her heart in such trembling loving hope, came surging over her together; and before they rose from their knees she was sobbing uncontrollably, pressing her fingers almost into her eyes in her vain endeavours to check the tears.

"Poor lassie! ye're just overdone!" Leslie said, patting her shoulder gently. "I believe ye've been fond o' her." But Jeanie could not stay any longer,

and ran away up-stairs to hide herself and her tears.

That little breakdown did her good, however; and enabled her to be calm through the trying hours of the next day, doubly trying to her and to Mrs. Ledingham, in that they were denied the comfort of attending the Church service—that not being customary for female mourners. Jeanie felt that she should never forget the moment when she saw Leslie stand up to follow his child from the door to which she should never return: quite calm and quiet and self-controlled, but with an expression of such deep resigned sorrow on his kind open face—a sort of resolute resignation that would not give way more, or allow emotion to interfere with the hardest duties. Truly poor Jeanie felt the sorrow and the sympathy of a member of the family as she watched the little procession as far as it was visible from the window. Four lads of S. Mary's choir carried the small white-covered coffin—the rest met it at the church-gate, with the grey-haired old pastor: and so with glad hopeful hymns and prayers that tell of the Christian's triumph over death, little Katie Esslemont was laid to her rest in a quiet corner of the parish kirk-yard, beside the grave of the young mother who had died at her birth twelve years ago. There was a large following: it could not be otherwise: both as provost and merchant, as friend and neighbour, Leslie was too highly respected for his friends and acquaintance and fellow-townsmen not to wish to pay the last tribute to his little daughter. There were

many sympathizing hearts and moistened eyes in that gathering; and many an honest grip of the hand and well-meant word of would-be comfort poor Leslie had to undergo when all was over.

It was all over at length, however. And when the funeral bakemeats had been duly discussed, and the last of the solemn black-vested gathering of tradesmen and farmers and so forth, had departed, the three, feeling somewhat stiff and strange and forlorn, in their new "mournings," sat round the fire in the living-room, subdued and silent. At length, after clearing his throat once or twice, Leslie began as if rehearsing something which it was his duty to say: "Well, Jeanie, my dear, I suppose your charge is over. I'm sure ye've fulfilled it right well. I'm not able, ye know, to thank you as I would wish," and, as Jeanie made a gesture of deprecation—"No, no, I'm aware you're not seeking thanks—I know it's been a labour of love with you—but I feel it none the less.

"And now, Jeanie, my dear, ye've had a hard time this while, I'm perfectly aware ye're needin' to your own home. There's no occasion for month's notices, and the like o' that formalities, atween you and me; more than that, I desire nothing but just that ye suit your own and your mother's convenience; but I was to say to ye—as it had to be, it was best sayin' it at once—as soon as she and you please, I'll have pleasure in puttin' ye over to Deeside—that's all."

Jeanie looked, to say the truth, as she felt, a little

aghast. But he did not notice it, for he was looking before him, upon the ground. "Thank you," she said faintly. "I'm not in any hurry to seek home, if I can assist Aunt Annie in any way."

"No, my dear," he replied in the same quiet matter-of-fact tone. "Neither my mother nor I would wish ye to remain on for us. This is but a sad house for ye to stop in, now; and I'm perfectly aware ye've been overwrought this long while, and mis-rested, and needin' a change and quiet. There's little for my mother to do now, even had we no the sairvant." And with a sigh Leslie leant back in his chair, as though the subject were finished with.

"Very well," said Jeanie, quietly, "then I shall write my mother."

She rose up and went out of the room at once and up to her old refuge, the attic. She was to have the attic all to herself now, Grannie coming back to her old sleeping-quarters. She opened her long "kist," and took out her little writing-case, and sat down to write then and there.

How was it that she found it a difficult task to begin that letter? To go home to mother and Lizzie and the bairns, to her beautiful Deeside home and its congenial occupations, was that an unwelcome thought to Jeanie now! She could not surely have imagined that she was to have a permanent place in Leslie's household—that she was to live on there, indefinitely, Katie or no Katie—like his own daughter?

Oh no! and it was quite right, quite natural that they should not require her now. Only it had not struck her so: she had not yet wakened to the sense that her occupation was gone; and was consequently just a little surprised and hurt at first, at receiving, though in the kindest and most considerate manner, her employer's dismissal.

She would feel much at leaving too. Fond as she was of her own home, Abermurchie had become a second home to her, a home of deeper, tenderer associations than those of her childhood. For she had been a child when she left Deeside, but she could never go back to be a child again—since she had “lived and loved.” She had friends too from whom she would feel sad at parting—Mr. and Mrs. Fyfe and the Robbies. She had no friend on Deeside like Agnes Robbie. And she had grown sincerely fond of her motherly, or rather grand-motherly old Aunt Annie, who with all her uncompromising brusqueness had always been kind to Jeanie. Leslie, too—poor Leslie! She could not do *him* much good, she knew, though her heart might ache for him, as she thought of him coming in, in the evenings, with that sad quiet face, the half-involuntary glance towards the place of the unused sofa (which Aunt Annie had “hurled” to the furthest corner of the room and swathed considerably in a piece of old sheeting), and sitting down in his chair with those heavy gasping sighs which were the only outward expression now of his grief. *She* could

never take the place of his lost Katie; but still she would have liked to do what was in her to do, to show him *some* little attention, some little return for all his kindness—and by the time she had reached this stage in her cogitation poor Jeanie's tears were dropping upon her unwritten sheet as she twisted the pen aimlessly in her fingers. It recalled her to herself, however; and she began at last, and got the letter written ready for the first post in the morning.

The answer when it came was not quite what she expected. Margaret wrote in some anxiety, saying that poor Sammy Merchant had been ill for several days with what the doctor had pronounced to be diphtheria. He was going on favourably; but though with care there was no great danger to the other members of the household, there might be more risk to one coming from elsewhere into the midst of the infection; and Margaret therefore hoped it would be convenient to Leslie and his mother to let Jeanie stay some weeks longer. Of course they were happy to do so, and Jeanie, though anxious now about the home-folk, was not unwilling to stay. But it was a sad trying time for her; feeling that she was only there at best as a visitor, and missing, as she could not but sorely miss, the child who had been her hourly care. She had time now to realize the blank which in the first few mournful days she could hardly do.

Aunt Annie went about much as usual. Leslie they never saw from breakfast till late in the evening.

He seemed to put off his return home as long as possible, to avoid as much as he could the sad silent hours at home. And on Sundays, what part of the day was not occupied at church he sat by the fireside, with his Bible, seldom speaking a word.

Jeanie's duties were of course but light now, though she assisted Aunt Annie as much as she was able. It did occur to her once to think, as she was performing some fine repairs upon Leslie's best shirts, that Aunt Annie's eyes would not manage *that* work now—they would have to get some one else to do it; but no doubt it would be given to Agnes. Jeanie sighed a little thereover, as she put her most delicately fine stitches into requisition, perhaps for the last time, for him.

Agnes lamented much when she learnt that Jeanie's remaining in her neighbourhood was only a question of weeks. Jeanie was often with her during these sad days, which were yet precious as they passed by.

"I can't seem to feel as if you were going," Agnes said, one afternoon when Jeanie had come to tell her, not without some tears, that the day had been fixed for her to leave. "Somehow I've always felt as though ye belonged to them. And yet I know Mrs. Peter couldn't be needing ye now with only herself and Leslie to notice, and she keeps a sairvant too. Ye'll be glad to go to your home, no doubts."

"Ay, I'm glad, but I'm real sorry to leave here: and to leave *you*, dear."

"I don't know what I'll do when you're away, Jeanie. I missed ye so terrible last summer. And now I suppose I'll never see ye again. Will ye be stoppin' at home now?"

"Perhaps I may, I'm not carin' very much to seek service at present."

"Ay. And I suppose you're not needin' to go out."

"No; not just exac'ly. My mother will be glad of me at home, I believe, for my sister Lizzie's wantin' into the town to learn dress-makin'. But an' she were not—there was a thing's been in my mind now and again—but ye'll not speak of it, Aggie, for I've never told it to any, and maybe it'll never be."

"No; what then?"

"Well, it was to be a nurse at the Children's Hospital," Jeanie said. "I believe, ye know, I've a good turn for it; and I feel so for littlins that's unwell, and always shall, for the sake of my own dear lammie that's away," Jeanie ended, wiping her eyes.

"I daresay," said Agnes, quietly. "But surely ye wouldn't tie yourself down to the like of that—and you so young and bonnie, and has your health so well. Ye'll be gettin' married, lassie."

"I don't think that's likely," Jeanie said, with a little sob in her voice.

"No?" said her friend. "Ye've been too much set upon my poor brother maybe—such a true heart's ye have! But you wouldn't be doin' him any wrong, ye know, dear—gin you met in with a good man that loved

ye. I think there'll surely be many will love ye," Agnes added, tenderly stroking Jeanie's hand which she held.

"I don't know for that, but I don't feel like as if I would ever marry, Agnes," Jeanie repeated again.

They had a very tender, sorrowful parting, those two, so nearly sisters. They promised to write to one another, and never to forget their days of friendship, and Jeanie declared that if anything brought her again to Abermurchie she would be sure to visit her friend.

The parting from aunt and cousin was of a less demonstrative kind. Mrs. Peter kissed and blessed her great-niece, wishing every good thing might attend her. Leslie spared no pains to make her sensible of his gratitude. He paid her far beyond the modest wage at which Margaret estimated her daughter's services, giving her over and above a handsome entire suit of new mourning. He accompanied her too as far as the change of railway, putting her into the Deeside carriage: but his farewell was of the simplest. Only a hearty grip from the large strong hand and a quiet, "God bless you, Jeanie—good-bye."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LESLIE'S BLACK SOCKS.

MARGARET LEDINGHAM was very glad to have her wise useful second daughter at home once more.

But she was far from satisfied with Jeanie's looks when she returned. It was perhaps only to be expected that the anxiety and sorrow, the fatigue and watching of the past sad winter should have left its traces upon the girl. But even these scarcely accounted for the languor and depression, the want of heart and life, which showed itself in poor Jeanie nearly always now : try as she might to take up her old works with interest, to be the active home-helper which she had always been. Margaret watched her anxiously for a week or so ; but though she did not improve in looks or spirits, Jeanie never complained of anything tangible. But after a fortnight had passed poor Jeanie went from that depression to a greater and a worse, and after vainly trying to struggle against her feelings of discomfort and to keep up, succumbed to a very unmistakable attack of diphtheria.

For some days her life was in great danger. But she had a vigorous young constitution, and a skilful practical doctor: and with Heaven's blessing on his skill, she was saved, and got over the attack—as Sammy Merchant had done.

Of course she was very weak, and needed great care and watching. Margaret greatly feared the infection spreading, and at the first alarm, despatched her younger children under the care of a servant to lodge with an old friend of her husband's at Stralogie. They had not yet returned, when one fine spring evening Margaret and her daughter were sitting together in the inner parlour, whither the invalid had for the first time moved that day. Jeanie was sitting in an easy-chair near the window, her knitting-wires in her hand, and on them a half-finished large black worsted sock. Jeanie had "warped" a pair for Leslie when the time of her leaving seemed indefinite, and had brought them home to finish, but was unable to do so before her illness. It was the first time she had taken up a bit of work, and she almost wondered to find her hands so weak, and that she was obliged to lay down her wires after a row or two.

"They've no fusion,* mother," she said, with a rather pitiful little smile. "I mind myself upon our dear wee lammie, how it was always 'so tired!' with her."

"Ay," said her mother. "Ye'll feel yersel' weaker, I believe, when ye try to go about first, than when ye

* power, control.

were lyin'. But ye are a bittie better the day, Jeanie—I can see that."

"Oh yes. I'm growin' better." And then Jeanie remained for a time silent, looking out of the window. She was thinking whether the time had not come to tell her mother of her secret wish—which had rather strengthened since she had been raised up from her perilous sickness. At last she began :

"I say, mother."

"Say on, my dear."

"Mother, will I tell ye what's been in my mind this while, to ask if ye'd allow me try it?"

"Surely, my dear."

"Mother"—with rather an effort. "I would like to offer myself as a nurse at the Children's Hospital in town."

"You! Jeanie!"

"Yes. I, mother. I like to do for the littlins that's unwell—to try, I mean, to make them comfortable and happy. I could so well understand what my pettie liked, and it would always seem to me as if I was still doing something for her, to be among them. 'Deed, mother, I think it's what I'm fittest for, in the world!"

"Dear me, Jeanie, I would not have thought so myself! And who or whatever has put it into your heid?"

"None but myself. I've never spoken of it to any, unless Agnes, my friend, ye know."

"Well, I must say," said Margaret, "it's no what I should choose for a young lass like you, that's always

been accustomed wi' a country life, to shut yerself up to the like o' nursing, so young's ye are, and all!"

"I feel very old," said poor Jeanie, passing her hand over her brow with rather a weary air. "And I seem to have seen such a lot of trouble."

"I doubt ye've had ower much ado wi' other folk's troubles, lassie. 'Deed, I've misdoubted myself if I did right to let ye give yersel' up to the nursin' of this poor wee bit childie as ye have. Had we been able to foresee that the poor thing was nae to grow better, and that, I would have really prefaired that Leslie had got a professed sick-nurse to her."

"Oh don't say so, mother! It's been the happiest thing in my life that I was able to help her some, my own wee pettie! and she did love me so! Mother, I don't think there's anything on earth like a child's love. It never disapp'ints ye. And that's one thing why I'd like best always to be among bairns: and I seem to love them better when they're suffering, poor wee things!"

Margaret sighed. Jeanie might *feel* old, but she was young, too young to talk in this way. Life was all before her, though she had had one disappointment; but probably she was weak and dispirited just now. Margaret spoke again.

"Well, Jeanie, every one has their own tastes, and maybe ye've had a good training for this work so far. But ye've had a sair time, and a heap of fertigg, and what no—and ye're just new-risen from a sick-bed; and so until ye were some rested, and strong, and had

some change, I really could not feel it right to allow ye undertake hard work, least of all such a weerin' close confined life as this nursin' be to be."

"Then ye're no for me to try it?"

"Not in the meantime, lassie."

Poor Jeanie said no more then, but made a sort of spasmodic plunge into her knitting. She knew that her mother, gentle and tender as she was, was also very decided, and seldom changed her opinion. Jeanie had set her heart a good deal upon this project of hers, upon which Margaret had now pronounced her veto indefinitely.

Both mother and daughter remained silent for some time, till Margaret heard a sort of tearful sniff, and saw that the tears were dropping fast upon Leslie's black sock.

"Jeanie, lassie! ye're no taking this so sair to heart?"

"I'm just foolish, mother. Do you never mind me. I'll be better, once I grow strong. I don't know what's ado wi' me the now."

"Ye're overwroucht, lassie, I ken fine—let alone yer sickness. Do you just put past that weeres" (wires) "and dinna try it till ye're some stronger."

Jeanie laid the wires meekly on the window-sill beside her, and rolled up her knitting. "He'll have long to wait for the socks at this rate," she said with a sigh.

"Do you think he'd have you fechtin' wi' his socks

and you just new out over yer bed? Ye'd have far better sendin' them back to Aunt Annie, I'm thinkin', and let her finish them oot."

"I wouldn't be willin' to do that," Jeanie said quietly. "It's maybe the last piece of work I'll do for him, poor fella." But at this pathetic reflection, Jeanie's lip quivered again and the tears fell faster.

Margaret sighed once more. I know not what she might have said, but for the interruption caused by her servant-lass looking into the room abruptly, with: "That's Mr. Esslemont at the door askin' if he would see ye."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A COUSINLY CONFIDENCE

"EH, mother, don't let him ben the house," Jeanie cried, the colour coming into her pale cheeks. "The infection, ye know."

"It's all right, my dear," answered Margaret soothingly. "I'll speak wi' him ootside," and she rose and went to the house-door. There, having walked up from the station, stood Leslie—but with such a haggard anxious face, that Margaret was quite shocked. "How is she, Margaret?" were his first words.

"Better—a good deal better. But come ye away fra' the hoose, and doon the ro'd a little till we get spoken. I'm for nobody comin' ben."

"Fy, I'm not frightened," said Leslie. "I would have been over before to ask for her, only I've been rather unwell myself, this while."

"Ye have? I thought surely some way ye hadn't been well. What was it again?"

"Deed, Margaret, I could hardly tell ye. I wasn't able to rise for four-five days, whatever. Doctors

must always give things a name, and Spence spoke about suppressed gout—but I don't think that's been altogether the cause. He tells me I would need to get away, some way, for a change—but where would be the use o' that, Margaret?—it would only be worse, the home-coming. However," drawing himself up resolutely, "I'm better. I'm not here to speak o' myself. Tell us about yon jewel o' a lassie—she's really doin' well, is she?"

"Yes, the Lord be thankit, she is. There was a whilie I was real feared for her; and she's gey weak, of course, she would get nothing taken for so long; but ye see, it was the Almighty's good pleasure to spare her to me," Margaret ended with a sigh of thankfulness.

"His Name be praised," said Leslie gravely and reverently. "Margaret, I could never tell ye what I've been feeling about her—and to think she'd maybe weakened her health, with her care of my childie. I couldn't be too thankful she's spared: for she'll be a blessing go where she may."

"Ye've been awful kind to her," Margaret said. "'Deed I've thought this while sin' she's been home, that she's left a good part of her heart at Abermurchie."

"Maybe," he said, quietly. "She was terrible fond of—of *my* little one; and besides, I know her heart was sore set upon poor John Robbie, and they'd had all their courtin' there."

"Just that. But I wasn't thinkin' so much about John Robbie. I doubt Jeanie was well quit o' *him*,

Poor creature—and she's resigned herself to what be't to be. I've doubted wi' myself this while, that ye've gotten a bit o' the lassockie's heart yourself, Leslie."

"I!" he exclaimed, turning pale. "Margaret, for Heaven's sake don't jest wi' me—I cannot stand that."

"I mean't no jest, Leslie. I'm not much i' the custom o' jestin': I don't feel in jestin' frame the noo, whatever. But it always comes to me, someway, to say what's in my thoughts to you; and, 'deed, was it any affront to mint that ye might have made her some fond o' ye?"

"Nay—don't accuse me, Margaret," he said almost piteously. "Did you not give your daughter to my care, and did I not take her into my household, on the understanding that she was to be as my daughter? And would I so betray your confidence, and my own word given, that I would be seekin' to make love to her? More than that, did ever I put any obstacle between her and my good-brother John Robbie? Was I not rather ready to assist them by any means in my power, had things gone right with him? Ye might surely do me justice so far."

"Forgive me, Leslie, if I have spoken too rash," said the mother, a little hurt. "I should have known better."

"There's no harm done, Margaret, so far. If ye'd accused me of loving her, alone, maybe ye'd have been nearer the truth. But I haven't stolen her heart. I released her as soon as she was free. If I'd done what

was best for *myself*, maybe, I'd have put her home months ago; but my child was always needing her so sore. However, as I say, there's no harm done—except to myself," he ended, with a strange little laugh. "And I suppose I'll get over this, like other things. It's no the first time, whatever."

"But what—do ye mean to tell me, than, Leslie, that ye *do* love this poor bit girlie of mine?"

Leslie stopped in their leisurely walk, and turned round, facing his cousin. "Well, I believe that's just about the miserable state of the case, Margaret."

Margaret said nothing at first. A faint flush mounted to the sunburnt cheek, a little smile—perhaps at her own discernment, played around eyes and mouth.

"I'm a fool, I know," Leslie went on half-angrily. "I didn't come here to say this—only you women, you get at the bottom of everything. But ye can just forget it, as though it had never been said—as I mean to do."

"Ye do?"

"Ay. Margaret, I'm a fool in this, but I'm not all a fool. It doesn't follow, because I love your daughter, that she loves me. And I'm *sairtain* she doesn't love me."

"Ye are?"

"I am."

"Yet ye never put it to her?"

"No; nor never would."

"It seems strange, too."

"Maybe—maybe I'm a sort of a coward, and I had rather not hear it from herself."

"And ye're so very sure?"

"Yes, Margaret. Remember, I've seen a good deal of Jeanie. I've seen her in love, and I've seen her lots of ways. She's real kind to me, and likes me in a sort of a fashion, I've no doubt: she'd do anything in her power for me, I well believe—but for lovin', she'd as soon fall in love wi' her grandfather, gin he were livin'."

"Well, Leslie, ye say so. But I'm her mother, and I should know her as well as you; and I doubt ye're not altogether right."

"No? and what makes ye think that?"

"Oh, well. There's little things, ye know, that seem too frivolous when one comes to speak of them—one thing, if ye'd seen her face when she haird ye was here even-noo—and yet, so anxious she was ye shouldn't come ben the place, for infection."

"God bless her!" said Leslie earnestly and gravely. "But I doubt it's just her kind heart and her mindfulness o' others, always."

"Maybe. It's no my part, any way, to ask ye to speak to her. Fowks knows their own affairs best."

"And there's her to consider," Leslie went on, as if following out a train of thought. "I tell ye, she likes me in a fashion, and she's real sorry for me; and it would grieve her sorely to have to bid me go my ways for a great auld idiot—which is what it would come to."

"Ay, if ye think so," said his cousin demurely.

"Look at my age too—and hers. It's just the biggest absurdity."

"Ye're nine-and-thirty—that's no great ages, is it?"

"I'm forty the year. I'm liker fifty, I'm aware."

"I dinna know for that. And Jeanie's no a child. She's had her troubles and her experience, though she be young—and she was aye a sober-like wise creature, Jeanie."

"Well, and do ye mean me to understand, Margaret, that, an' the lass liket me—which she never would—ye'd be willin' to give her to me?"

"I don't know a man to whom I'd sooner trust a child's happiness," Margaret answered earnestly. "But mind ye, Leslie, though I've spoken so free to ye, ye're no to act on *my* sayin', again' yer own better judgment. All I know is, the girl hasna been like herself, sin' ever she came home this time. It may be Katie, and it may be John Robbie—I cannot say. But if your heart's sair set upon the girl, it seems scarce fair to either o' ye, not to give her a chance of speakin' her mind, the t'ae way or the t'ither."

Leslie stopped, and drew a long sigh. Then he said abruptly: "How far are ye comin', Mistress Ledingham? yon's the station." For they had wandered on, unthinking, more than half way towards it. And Margaret had nothing on her head but her neat close cap, and not even a shawl about her shoulders.

"Well, I'm maybe best turnin' here," she answered. "Ye haven't long to wait, if you're for back wi' the neist train."

"No. Well, I think, Margaret—I think I'll come back gin a fortnight, and see her, any way, when she's better. That can do no harm. And in the meantime I think I'll take Spence's advice and run away somewhere for a bit change—Edinburgh maybe. I can easy leave your Peter in charge. He's doin' extraordinar' well."

"I'm real glad to hear it," said the mother.

"And how's Sandy—young Craigies—eh?"

"Fine. He's had a heap adee* wi' Sammy lyin', but he's real well. See, that's him pleughin'—hyne awa' at the border o' the wood. He'll be sorry to have missed ye. Well, good-bye, Leslie—hist ye back again!"

"Thanks, Margaret." And in a lower tone he added, "ye'll keep your own counsel, ye know, upon this."

"Ye may depend upon me doin' that." And so they parted, and Margaret walked homeward very thoughtfully.

On the whole, however, her thoughts were of a hopeful nature. For she had read, by some of those little tokens legible to mothers' eyes, that her Jeanie had not returned from Abermurchie altogether heart-whole: at the same time that she could not be absolutely certain of the object of Jeanie's fancy. She might still be fretting for the dead lover, but Margaret did not think so. And now her cousin Leslie—her almost brother, though

* adee, ado,—to do.

only step-cousin—the big wise-like reliable man who had been her great stay and standby ever since he had grown out of childhood a little after her—had told her—had shown unmistakably that he loved this child of hers! Yet she was scarcely surprised: she only felt comforted to know that if Jeanie's heart had been unconsciously given to her fatherly cousin, it had not been given in vain.

Margaret found Jeanie just as she had left her, on her return. Jeanie was lying back in her chair, her hands resting in her lap, with the idle knitting-wires between her fingers.

"Well, lassie, have I been long?" Margaret asked as she went in. "I've been near the length o' the station with him—so as he was well out over fro' the place. He's real glad to hear ye're keepin' better, and so on. It was just to speer for you, principally, that he came."

"So mindful," said Jeanie, smiling a little. "And how's himself?"

"Pretty well; he says he hasn't been very well this while, and is speaking of going away for change, to Edinburra, likely, he says."

"I doubt he's needin' a change," Jeanie said.

"He's to be back in a while to see you—when ye're quite better," Margaret could not help adding, glancing a little at Jeanie to see how she took it.

"I'll be right glad to see him," she said, so quietly and unconsciously that her mother began to wonder if she were mistaken after all.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SORTING THE DUCKLINGS.

LESLIE was not backward in paying his promised visit.

He came to Craigendykes one fine spring-like afternoon in the very end of April, and found Margaret in the house alone; the younger bairns being at school, Sandy in the fields, Jeanie—

“I believe Jeanie’s out amo’ the hens eynow; she’s holdin’ a time wi’ some young ducklin’s that’s new come out.”

“Then I think I’ll just go out and I’ll maybe find her.”

“Ay, ye’ll easily do that, if ye like—she’s no far out over, whatever.”

So Leslie went, and he was not long in finding Jeanie. A little outside the rick-yard, in a grassy corner, Jeanie had set the coop containing her pets; and now she was entirely absorbed in the task of collecting the little recusants, who ran out between the bars as fast as she for some reason best known to herself drove them in. So absorbed indeed was she that she

was quite unaware of the visitor who stood a little behind and watched her. A pretty picture of simple rural life, as with the flush of returning health on her cheeks, the broad afternoon sunshine on her uncovered auburn head, her dark stuff gown turned up carefully in front above the wincey petticoat, Jeanie dodged about deftly after the little birds, lifting one here, driving in another there, and finally, having fastened all securely, stood fondly contemplating her family.

"Well, have ye sorted that ducklin's to satisfaction?"

How Jeanie started! "Leslie!" was all she said, but a deeper colour flitted over her face as she held out her hand to him.

"I beg your pardon for startin' ye. Your mother said I would get ye out here. So, ye're out of your quarantine now?"

"Eh yes. I'm not frightened to let any one come to me. How's Aunt Annie keepin'?"

"Oh, my mother's fine. She bid me give her love to you, likewise Agnes."

"I heard from Agnes the other day. She's pretty well, I believe?"

"Yes, I think so. And are you really strong now, Jeanie?"

"Oh yes, thanks—at least I'm not just quite so strong as I should be, but I'm quite better."

"Would ye take a turn with me round the home park? It's better than in the house, I think, this fine night."

"Certainly," said Jeanie. The "home park" of course adjoined the rick-yard, which opened into it at present without a barrier. A few yearling calves were sunning themselves in it now after the winter's captivity; but there was no other live tenant of the field to disturb their *tête-à-tête*.

In one corner of the park lay a wooden one-horse roller, the shafts resting on the ground. "I think we'll get sitten here a few minutes," Leslie said, looking at it: so accordingly they seated themselves on the bar between the shafts. Poor Leslie was not sorry to sit down. He had walked up from the station; and it was a warm languid spring day, the roads heavy and soft with the breaking of long frosts—everything growing and luxuriating in the mildness of the sun and air; a day to take it out of any one—especially a stout man after a stiff walk. Leslie took off his hat, and wiped his face and brow deliberately, before he spoke.

"Yon's a grand prospect," was his first remark. "We've nothing like it on our side."

For on a near horizon line the great Grampian range lay stretching eastward and westward: its higher summits—Mount Keen and Lochnagar (not "dark" now, but white with the lingering winter snow)—towering above their fellows; and this line thrown back by the warmer browns and greens of pine-woods on many an intermediate range, in infinite variety of light and shade.

"It's real pretty," Jeanie agreed. She had no better

adjective, simple maiden that she was, for the glorious panorama so familiar to her eyes from infancy, which, however, she loved with the deep attachment of one born in sight of the mountains. Neither spoke for some time after that, till Jeanie broke the silence by saying, "How are you yourself now, cousin? Ye've been away for change, I heard—it should have done you good."

"Yes, I was a week at Edinburgh—but I don't know that it did me any great good." Then he added abruptly: "Ye're not really caring to know how I am, Jeanie."

"Why should ye say that?" asked Jeanie, a little hurt. She could not quite understand Leslie's manner to-day. In all their past familiar and close intercourse, their words had been mainly practical and matter-of-fact, concerning Katie, or some one else; there had never been anything personal or confidential—except on the one occasion of her confidence to him, and those few others when Leslie had spoken words of kindly sympathy to her on her own love affair.

"Why? because it couldn't be other," Leslie answered. "What would a young lassie like you be caring, supposing I were to tell you everything had gone wrong with me?"

"No?" was Jeanie's half-frightened, inconsequent response. "Is it your business?"

"Fy, no. There's nothing airthly wrong with the business, or with your brother, or with any of them—

unless just the heal." He stopped for a few minutes, then began in rather a different tone: "Do you know, Jeanie, if it had been the Almighty's Will to spare my little daughter's life, I believe we—we four—might have gone on living the way that we were, quite happy and contented, without wishing for any change. I don't know, of course, for you—but I can answer for myself."

"I was very well satisfied," Jeanie answered quietly.

"I was the same. I was happier, any way, than I was aware of. And ye know, I had scarce time to think of or wish for anything else, nor I don't believe I ever should, except to do anything I could to pleasure *her*—that had so few pleasures!" he paused and sighed heavily. "But since she's away—and you're away, Jeanie, I'm just like one in a dream. I feel always such a want. I go to my office of mornings, and I sit there, and I think, 'Why am I doing this? What good is it to me to make money and spend my days gathering what I've no use for, after my poor mother's away, but just to leave to the Church maybe, or some charity, and none owing to me to be the better for it?' And the long weary day goes by and my work's done, and there's nothing but to go home—and let my mother, dear good creature, do what she will, what sort of a home is it to go back to, and miss what ye always looked for to welcome ye, and was just the whole object of your life? Mr. Fyffe has said to me once or twice lately, I had gone near to make an idol of the child. It's possible I did. And yet, Jeanie,

the thought has been in my mind this while—especially I might say the last month—that it's not just *all* the want of my little pettie that I'm feeling."

There was silence then—a silence felt by them both. The calves at the corner of the field were having a little sham fight; and then they separated, and galloped across it for a short way, and then stared round and began to feed again. Jeanie was aware of this, and seemed to recollect it afterwards; but she sat without speaking till he went on again.

"My little lassie will not come back to me again, supposin' I were to ask her—that's one thing very certain," he said with an almost quaint pathos in the tone. "And I would not—I would not seek to bring her back again—from her happy home, into this vale of tears. I shall go to her, in His good time—but she shall not return to me. But—but, Jeanie—would *you*?"

I don't think Jeanie could have spoken a word then. But neither could she have helped the half-involuntary impulse with which she lifted her joined hands, and put them in those of her big cousin. And somehow, the next moment his arm was around her; and her head was resting where little Katie's had so often rested—"like his own daughter."

"*My* Jeanie!" he said, in a low tone of intense feeling. "My own at last."

There was no doubt that each understood the other now, without more words.

"Isn't it strange," he said at length after they had so

sat, forgetful of everything else, for some minutes in rapturous silence, "that you are just the only one I could have thought it possible to put in the place of my childie's mother—and yet I would have thought you most entirely out of my reach, a whilie back? And are ye sure, Jeanie, that you can bring yourself to put up with me, that am so much older than you, and such a dull old fellow to live with? Ye would need to consider well of it, my dear, for you're young and bonnie enough, and there's plenty young lads likely would be seeking your hand."

"I'm not seeking young lads," said Jeanie quietly. "I *know* you—and I like you best."

"Ye do? God bless you, my dear! Then I've no fear with His help but I'll be able to make you happy. My first poor lassie and I were real happy together."

"I'm frightened I'll never be so good as she was," Jeanie said in a low voice.

"Well, I don't see that we need raise comparisons. I'm certain you would have loved her, whatever. I only had her, ye know, for a bare two years; but she was—there, I could never tell ye what she was!" he ended earnestly.

"She'd been some like Agnes, I fancy."

"Some, perhaps: not altogether. She was bonnie by Agnes. Such pretty eyes she had, and whiles such a delicate colour in her face. Your *own* sweetheart," he went on, stroking gently the hand which he held—"poor Jock, was likest her of them all in the face."

She was the oldest, but one son : and she was terrible forfoughten" (overworked) "among them all, such a family as they'd been, and the mother not strong—forbye a heap of sewing she took ; and she was so delicate. I always promised myself, once she was my own, I'd keep her so that she should have nothin' ado but grow strong and well ; but ye see, it just all went the other way. My mother's told you, no doubt, what was the end. She had a deal to suffer, especially the last year of her life : and when she was best, it was a weary kind of drag on, I would think worse to bear than a sharper illness that goes over and is done with ; but I never heard a murmur come from her lips for as many troubles as she had, poor thing.

"She wasn't my first love, either, ye know. I'd had a sore disappointment before that, when I was quite a young lad—when your Aunt Elsie married. I was terrible fond of her, and I thought she liked me just as well ; but I was mistaken, ye see. However, I'm sure I couldn't have been happier with any one than I was with my poor Kate, unless just her health.

"It's strange I should be speaking of her so much to you, of all people, Jeanie, after so many years. But I've never had any that I cared to speak of her to. My mother never knew her, ye might say, to really appreciate her : and what would have been the use of speaking to the child of what she had never known and would never miss ? But, some way, I like to speak to *you* about her, and I feel sure you won't take it ill."

"'Deed, no!" said Jeanie, shaking her head. "If only I was better fitted to stand in her place—if I could make up to ye any, Leslie, for the want of her, and of our pettie, I'd be only too happy, I'm sure!"

"There's no doubts ye'll do that, dear. And listen while I tell ye this, Jeanie—what I never told to livin' soul yet. The very last morning of her life—right ill she was, poor thing—she said to me all at once: 'Leslie, if I'm not to win through now, you'll be to marry again.' 'Not likely,' I said, or some such words. 'Yes,' she said so earnest, and stood to it. 'I know you'll never forget poor Kate. But you must give my child a mother.' They were near the last connected words I ever heard her speak. And though I shouldn't have obeyed her words in the letter, I think I may truly say I have in the spirit: for no mother could have been more to that little suffering angel, during the last two years of her life, than you have been. And what would the dear pettie herself say to me, one day when we'd been speakin' of what I was to do when she was gone, 'Dada,' she says to me, 'I think ye should just marry Jeanie.' Now, what do ye say to that?"

What Jeanie actually said was nothing; but her tears were dropping fast now upon her lap.

"Give me a kiss, lassie, your own self," he said presently. "I've never had one from ye yet."

Jeanie obediently lifted up her head and kissed the honest broad face that was beaming upon her with an expression of happy content such as it had not worn for

many a day, though the eyes were full of tears—the deep grey eyes flecked with brown, which Katie had so closely inherited.

I am afraid to say how much longer they two sat there—between the shafts of the roller—not talking, for, after these few unwonted confidences, Leslie relapsed into silence, and Jeanie likewise was in thoughtful mood. The awakening to the full understanding of her real feeling for Leslie was sufficiently wonderful to her; she had not been aware that she had loved him after this sort, though she now knew that it must have been so, for some time past. This was the true explanation of the sinking of heart which she had experienced at his dismissal; the gathering depression and weariness which, culminating in her dangerous illness, had made her feel at that time as if she would fain lay down her arms in the life-contest, and shut her eyes for ever to this world and its disappointments, if only youthful vitality had not been too strong. This was the true explanation of that aching sympathy with his sorrow, that longing to comfort him in his loneliness—oh, thank God that these might now flow on in their proper sanctified channel! that it was now her duty, not her trial, to love and serve him, her appointed lot to soothe and comfort him, as she best knew how.

It was a different sort of love from her first experience; as different as this substantial middle-aged true-hearted man from the fickle delicate boy who had first won her heart. Jeanie looked back with a curious

revulsion of feeling, almost with shame, at her former estimation of her cousin ; how she used to think of him as old, and bald, and fat, and stupid ! Old—why, there were *only* nineteen years between them ; and bald—well, he was certainly getting a little bald on the top, but he had not a grey hair either in head or beard, whatever ! and for the rest, he might be a tolerable size, but he looked very comfortable and respectable—just what a provost ought to be ; and he was as well-informed and intelligent as most of the men with whom Jeanie was in the habit of associating. No ; she was quite satisfied with him ; and she knew him too well, and loved him too well, to doubt her own sufficiency to satisfy him.

He was the first to break the spell of that blissful silence. “We’re gettin’ some cold, sittin’, I doubt.” In fact he found himself cooling more than was altogether agreeable after his warm walk, and subsequent agitation. “And I’ll require my time, if I’m to catch the six o’clock train to town. I’m stopping there the night.” So they got up, and came out of the shafts, and he gave her his arm. “Your mother will think ye’re an awful time sortin’ the ducklin’s,” he added, with a little chuckle over his own pleasantry.

Near the house they met Margaret, who had been “on hospitable thoughts intent,” and was looking for her visitor to partake of the refreshment which she had been preparing.

“Well, Margaret,” said Leslie, as they two walked to

meet her, arm-in-arm, "here's a lassie that's for back with me to Abermurchie, to stop for altogether. What do ye say—will I get leave to take her?"

Margaret smiled—a happy smile of comprehension.

"Not the night," he went on, as if explaining. "I doubt we'll have to go before Mr. Penreath first, and a few other little matters to arrange; but I suppose ye'll be as good's your word to me, eh?"

"I don't often go from my word," said the mother, with a quiet smile. "Take her, Leslie, and may the good Lord's blessing be upo' ye both, is my airnest prayer."

"Thanks, Margaret," said Leslie, as he turned and kissed the sisterly friend of early days. And then, as they went on into the house, he added: "Did ye never think the lassie had a look of her aunt Elsie?"

CHAPTER XL.

CONCERNING THE PROVOST'S MARRIAGE.

MRS. PETER LEDINGHAM was a happy woman next day.

Although she had never ventured so far, as little Katie had done, in giving her son advice on the subject of his marriage, she had often thought anxiously, we know, about his future : she had thought, moreover, in her own mind more than once, how happy a cheerful healthy simple-minded girl like Jeanie might make him in the capacity of "number twa."

She was alone in the kitchen when about noon her son came in.

"Well, mother!" The tone was so much more cheery than he had been wont to use of late, that she looked up almost in surprise. "So ye're back, laddie?"

"Ay, I'm back. Listen while I tell ye this, mother." He placed one hand on his mother's shoulder, looking down earnestly, while she turned up her keen fresh little old face to him, listening with eyes and ears. "I've asked Jeanie Ledingham to come back here—you've no objections?"

"Ye have, Leslie? And is she comin'?"

"Ay, she's coming, bless her! But it's not just as your servant, old leddy," with a humorous twinkle in his eye. "She's comin' as my wife—now?"

"My dear lad—" Mrs. Ledingham began, and then relapsed into sundry little sniffs and snorts that impeded her words for some time. She was not a woman who shed tears often, or without cause; but she was quite upset by her feelings now. She fumbled about her trim round little person for a "pocket-napkin," and rubbed her eyes vigorously, but was obliged to sit down half-choking upon the broad window-seat; while her son sat down beside her, and put his arm round her, and let her have her little cry quietly. "Poor mother!" he said at last. "You're not well. What will I get ye?"

"Naething; I'll be a' right gin a few minutes. There, I'm a feel a'ld crater, an' shows it's time ye'd some one better to keep hoose to ye."

"Hoot toot! ye know it's no that. Are ye not pleased then?"

"Pleased, my dear! it's just the happiness that's garrin' me greet, ye know. If I'd had the orderin' o't mysel', I couldna have been better pleased. Ay, little Jean Ledingham! to think—well, I always liket the bit lassie, and she's more nor a bit lassie noo. And to think that she was nigh castin' in her lot wi' yon graceless rovin' oonhonest—"

"Whisht ye, mother!—no hard words of the dead. I

well believe Jeanie's had an escape there; but it was near more than I hoped for, that she'd be willing to take me, in place of some proper young lad of her own age. However, there it is, ye see—the dear lassie loves me, I think—and Heaven knows, I've loved her longer than she's thought."

"Well, I do say, God bless ye baith, Leslie, my dear! I'm sure she'll be a right wife to ye, and one that'll never give ye a cross word, or show ye a dour face, and she has splendid health, the Lord be praised! And may He spare her to ye, is my airnest prayer, to bring ye mair bonnie bairns, to comfort ye, in place of yon peer wee lammie that's awa'."

"Not just awa'," he said gently and gravely. "My little angelie in Paradise, that's maybe watchin' over me still, and that wished this very comfort to me that I'm gettin'."

They sat silent for a few minutes after that. And then Aunt Annie said: "And is this to be spoken of i' the meantime, Leslie?"

"Well, I suppose it's no needin' to be kept close. I'll tell Mrs. Robbie, and Mr. Fyffe, and old Spence, myself—I'll leave the rest o' the tellin's to you."

"Poor Pennie Spence," said his mother.

"What do ye mean by 'poor'?"

"It'll no be *good* news to her, I doubt."

"Oh, well, well. She must just turn her mind to something else. It's no *my* fault whatever. Any one must be a fool that ever thought I was for Pennie Spence."

No one rejoiced more heartily in the news than did Agnes Robbie. Poor Agnes had missed Jeanie sorely even in the short time of her absence; she had already come to look upon her as a fixture, a regular member of her brother-in-law's household: she loved her with sisterly affection; it was no shock, therefore, to learn that Jeanie was indeed to become her sister, though otherwise than they had once imagined; or to think of her as occupying her own dead sister's place. Jeanie wrote herself to her friend to announce her engagement; and received in reply a letter full of warm congratulations and loving rejoicing.

There were not a few friends and neighbours besides who rejoiced in hearing of Leslie's happy prospect. But there was one who neither rejoiced nor sympathized. It was even as Mrs. Peter had said. When the news was told to Miss Spence, her scorn and indignation, her wrath and despair knew no bounds. That the provost (he was no longer dear!) at *his* age, and in *his* position, should so lose himself as to take up with a hizzie of a girl young enough to be his own daughter, and who had been just his servant! If "papa" had not had it from Mr. Esslemont himself, Miss Spence would have refused to believe it! Well, there was no dependence on men; they were all fools, the best and steadiest of them! She always thought Jean Ledingham a sly designing girl; and no doubt she had played her cards well, casting off that poor delicate creature John Robbie, when she thought she had a chance of a better match; and had

managed to wheedle the silly man—and then to a sympathizing friend Miss Spence would shed tears over the fact that “such a fine man” had been so wheedled. A great many more, and more venomous, things Miss Spence contrived (in spite of “papa,” who stood up for his old friend, and declared he was doing the very best thing for himself both morally and physically) to whisper about among her select confidential friends: but happily the provost and Jeanie (and it might be added, Miss Spence herself), were too well known in Abermurchie for her words to do them any great harm.

The marriage was to come off shortly, since there was no object for delaying it. Jeanie asked for a month at home to prepare her things; and this suited Aunt Annie's arrangements very well, as she intended to leave her son's house at his marriage. Both Leslie and Jeanie wished her to continue to live with them, and even pressed it; but on this point the old lady stood firm.

It was at this time that Mrs. Peter, being engaged one day in her usual avocations, heard a rat-tat-tat at the door and a man's voice enquiring if Mrs. Ledingham lived here—breaking off at sight of her into a hearty “Hallo, Annie!—here you are, as young as ever!”

“Master Alickie! the laird himsel’!” cried Aunt Annie, dropping a “laigh curtsey” of infinite respect—the good old salutation of a past day, well-nigh dying out in this generation, which seems likely to forget

that if all men are equal before God, He Himself appointed their different ranks and stations. "I *am* proud to see ye, sir! And hoo's the lady, and a' the young ladies and gentlemen?"

"All well, all well, thanks," answered Strathkessachie, grasping the honest hard hand of his old nurse. "No, there are none of them come down yet. I was down about some building I have in hand, and stopped here to look at a pair of horses I heard were for sale; so I thought I would try and find you out. I needn't ask how you are, Annie; you are the picture of health! And how's your boy?"

"Eh, he's fine, thank 'ee, sir. He's a gey big boy the noo. Ye mind upo' Wullie Esslemont, his father? Folks used often to laugh about the little woman and the big man—an' his son's vera like him growin'—"

"Ay, ay, I 'mind,' Annie," said the good-natured laird. "Old Jamie is with me still, and as fresh as a two-year-old—like yourself."

Aunt Annie shook her head, laughing. "I doubt I'm nae just that, but I'm nae that ill!"

"No. Well, I'm glad I've found you at last. I ought to have done so long ago, but I don't often have occasion to stop here."

"Thankye, sir. And 'deed it's as well for me that ye've come now, for maybe ye'd not have found me here if ye'd been much later."

"No? Are you leaving this part, then?"

"Well, my son's to get married neist month—and

he'll no be needin' the auld woman, so I'm going to move out o' this."

"Indeed! Your son was married before, I thought—and surely the girls told me about a grandchild—"

"Yes, sir, there was, but she's away the noo, peer lamb. My son's been a widower this twal' year. He made—I'll no say a wrong marriage, but nae a wise one, when he was a yoong man. She was a peer oonhealthy frail-like creature, lived nae time—and left him with this wee bit, waikly lassockie. But she's deid, this winter—and a maircy it wis, baith to herself and all, when the Almighty took her: though I'll no say but we wis a' terrible fond o' her. And noo, he's contrackit to a real nice lass, that was her nurse for over twa' year—a Ledingham frae Deeside, and a great-niece of my last man, Peter Ledingham."

"Ah indeed. And this nice lass is turning you out of your house, eh?"

"Na, na, sir. They were both ill about me stoppin'! But na, na, says I. My son and 's wife shall have their hoose to themselves. I know fine new-married fowks is best wi'out anither to be wi' them, and though Jean Ledingham and me would nae likely fall oot, it's no rizen she should be annoyed wi' the a'ld woman. And I'm nae that helpless that I canna dee fine by mysel'—I wish I may be thankful! an' I'm quite oondependent ye know, sir, and I'll just get a roomie some other way, and mak' oot real well."

"Well, Annie," said the laird, when she stopped at

length, "you tempt me very much to make a proposal to you. We have been at great inconvenience this year about a house-keeper—some one to leave in charge of the house, principally. I wonder how you would like to come and live at Strathkessachie—eh?"

Aunt Annie cocked her little head on one side, robin-redbreast-like. "Is't all English sairvants, please?"

"Well, yes—all those who come down with us. But you would have your own room, and they should not interfere with you. It is during the winter and spring, during our absence, that it would be important to us that you should be there. You would have a lass, to keep you company, under you, to do the hard work; and you would take a general charge of all that was in the house. What do you say to it, eh?"

Mrs. Peter reflected for a few moments. It was a great temptation to her, truly, to go back to the district of her birth, the home of her girlhood, and the house whence she had married her Leslie's father, the husband of her youth. But she was never precipitate: so at last she looked up and said respectfully: "I beg your pardon, sir, I would like a day or two to consider of it."

"All right, Annie. No hurry. It will give me time to write to Mrs. Leslie—though for that matter, she will only be too thankful if you agree. Now what are you about?" he added jocosely. "Are you determined I am to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom to be?"

For Aunt Annie was spreading the table with her best wine-glasses, and wine, spirits, and biscuits—in true old-fashioned hospitable style.

Aunt Annie thoroughly enjoyed that visit from her Master Alickie; the only drawback being that he was obliged to leave, to catch a train, before her “gey big boy” made his appearance.

In few words, the arrangement which he had suggested to her was carried out. A further improvement was made later, by the laird placing at Mrs. Peter's disposal a little cottage at the end of his avenue, where she might bestow her worldly goods, and live for half the year, as “oondependent” as she could desire: holding herself in readiness to assume the care of the laird's house and furniture at all times during the absence of the family and their English servants.

This arrangement had the effect of setting Leslie's mind quite at ease about her; as he knew that she really preferred living to herself, and might look forward now to spending her declining years in her own beloved part of the country; under the wing of the family to whom she was so loyally and affectionately attached, and to whom she might for some years yet hope to render no unimportant service.

And so, when all preparations were made, Leslie went over to Deeside to wed his young bride. It was to be a very quiet wedding; for to both Leslie and Jeanie their sorrow was too recent for them to have borne anything like demonstrative merry-making on a large scale.

Aunt Annie, and Helen Grant and her husband, were the only guests.

Horace Penreath married them, at the little chapel at the brae-foot.

And when the short quiet ceremony was over, the happy couple went up to the head of Deeside, for a brief honeymoon. It was a real treat to both of them; and they spent a delightful time: wandering about the lovely woods and glens, and climbing as high up the hill-sides as was compatible with the provost's too obvious want of "training."

It was a lovely evening late in June when he took Jeanie home, by the old familiar railway line, between the green fertile fields and grey stone dykes of his own side of the country, less beautiful, but not less sunny and smiling than hers.

"Leslie," she said, as the train slackened speed for Abermurchie, "do ye mind upon the night you brought me here first?"

"Ay, love," he answered quietly. "I mind fine. You were sittin' opposite me in the dark, and teeting up now and again at me like a frightened roe—and me, I was just as frightened to think what I would say to you, and what way I would make you feel at home and comfortable with me. Well, ye see, yon was a lucky day for me and mine—Gudesakes!"

For, bang! bang! bang! went something under the wheels of the carriage, making poor Jeanie jump up with a scared face, and her husband, after one exclama-

tion of surprise, relapse into a hearty laugh of amused comprehension. For sundry of his enthusiastic friends and fellow-townsmen having heard that the provost was bringing home his bride by that evening train, had organized a telling salute of fog-signals. And there was the flag up on the town-hall, as if the Queen were coming; and quite a crowd to receive them on the platform. "Dear me, I never expected this!" was Leslie's surprised observation as he found himself surrounded and obliged to hand his wife into the principal hotel's best fly with a pair of horses, to be driven in state along the few yards to his house, amid vociferous cheers.

Another sound greeted them when they stood on their own door-step. S. Mary's bell was going for the six o'clock daily evensong.

"Would ye like just to step round to the prayers, my dear?" Leslie said. Perhaps a thrill of sudden recollection came back to him then of the first time he had taken poor Kate Robbie, a shy, half-wondering catechumen, to the same service: as well as of the day fourteen years ago when, a much smaller personage, both figuratively and literally—he had wedded her in her father's little parlour behind the shop. Jeanie's inclination went quite with his own, and in the quiet church they both felt it a relief to begin their life at home with an earnest prayer and thanksgiving.

They did not go home till they had walked round by the Established kirkyard—a picturesque though rather sombre burial-ground not far from the banks of Murchie,

shaded by a grove of ash-trees. And there, their steps led them to a stone not newly-erected, but on which an additional inscription had lately been added to the record that it stood in affectionate remembrance of Kate Robbie, the beloved wife of Leslie Esslemont. The new lines were as follows :

"Also of Kate Robbie Esslemont, their only and beloved daughter, who died the 5th March, 18—, aged 12 years.

"Talitha cumi."

Jeanie had not seen this, as it had only been added since she left. Her eyes filled with tears as she felt with singular force the significance of the quaint inscription.

"Do you like it, Jeanie?" he said at length. "It was my own doing, for I'd no one to consult—my mother never minded what I was to do. But I thought it seemed sort of appropriate—her age being just that, and so on."

"Yes, I do like it," Jeanie answered. "And it's strange, do ye know, yon time, when the dear pettie was lyin' and you so ill about her, I just always had the Gospel story in my mind steady—it seemed so like—and it seemed to make one wish so"—she paused as if afraid of breaking down.

"To wish one had lived in those days?" he said. "Ay, many's the time I've wished that. But the promise is the same for her, ye know. She *shall* arise—to a better life. I used to be very selfish, last winter,"

he went on. "People used to say—even my mother, at a time—when she was lying—that it would be a mercy when she was taken, And I *couldn't* feel it. I couldn't get resigned to the thought of wanting her—the wee bit facie o' her, always in the same spot, to welcome me, and her pretty ways and words, that grew prettier every day!" he paused with a deep sigh. "And when she was taken, Jeanie, I could never tell ye what I felt. It may seem ridiculous, to a great big fella like me to say so—but I declare to you, I felt like as though I could just lie down beside her and die."

"I was right sorry for ye then," said Jeanie, softly. "And I didn't know what way I could help you—unless one way. I did ask that you might be comforted."

"You did, my love? God bless you! Ye did help me, there's not a doubt. But I did try to be resigned—I can honestly say that—or ever I dreamed I was to have you back to me. I missed her, just as sorely—'deed I think me and you will miss her yet—but I tried to put self away and to think so happy as she is, and all her troubles and pains over. And the Lord has been very merciful to me—and has given me my best comforter."

CHAPTER XLI.

VALEDICTORY.

So the provost and Jeanie were married—"and lived happily ever after"? some one may ask.

Happy in themselves and in each other; with plenty of the good things of life, health to enjoy them, and a heart to share them with those less favoured than themselves; I think such a future may safely be predicted for them in so far as "living happily ever after" falls to the lot of any mortal couple out of the realm of fairyland.

It was a wonderful thing to Jeanie at first to take up the thread of her life at the old place, her home of over two years—the same yet so different: to be changed herself from the active useful subordinate, though loved and trusted, to the joint head of the household, the equal and friend, consulted on every occasion. But only at first. For Jeanie had but fallen into her right place now, and found her true vocation.

She brightened and sharpened up Leslie in a way which his mother with the best intentions could never

have done. Sorrow and disappointment, and the heart-loneliness which he could not but have felt sometimes with no companions save the old woman and the little child, had begun to make him an old man in many things before he was past the prime of life ; but Jeanie was in time to check the progress of this premature growing old. And she induced him to change for the better some of the indolent, old-fashioned ways which had begun to grow upon him. For instance, instead of only smoking at his house-door on fine evenings, or falling asleep over his paper indoors, Jeanie persuaded him to take her nice country walks, while the good weather lasted, by the banks of Murchie, or on the skirts of their one long range of crested hill ; where he could enjoy his pipe equally well, combined with the advantages of exercise, change, and Jeanie's society.

He became wonderfully cheerful ; indeed with Jeanie's even spirits and active brisk ways, he could hardly have been otherwise : though he had his moods of despondency, both retrospective and prospective. Past experience had made him almost morbidly apprehensive, and he watched over Jeanie with a solicitude which her vigorous frame and hardy healthy constitution little warranted ; while in the same calm childlike trustful spirit with which she had faced all the events of her life whether pleasant or painful hitherto, the young wife awaited the hour which should bring her alike the crowning trial and the crowning joy of womanhood. And when in the following spring,

just a year after Katie's death, their first-born child, a son, was given to them, poor Leslie could hardly at first bring himself to realize the exultant joy proper to the occasion, so deeply was he imbued with the idea that some fatality either to mother or child must ensue.

Old Dr. Spence, who well remembered the mournful beginning of poor little Katie's frail earthly career, was quite inclined to be angry with him. "Ye've a muckle stoot strong healthy bairn this time, provost," he said, "and your wife's just as well's ever I sa' a young mother—and what ye've to do is just to be thankful to a good Pro-vidence, and nae to freet and weer your ain self into a fever. Toot-awa' min! never go in about to Mistress Esslemont wi' 'yon face—garrin' her think she's deein'!"

Jeanie and her husband had both rather wished for a daughter, for the sake of their lost darling; but there was no doubt that Katie's little brother when he arrived was welcomed without any reserve. He received at the font the names of William John Leslie; the first after both grandfathers, and the second specially chosen by Leslie in remembrance of the young brother-in-law for whose memory he knew and respected his wife's undying love and pity.

Little Willie grew and flourished, a serene round-faced chubby child, inheriting largely his father's good temper, and with nothing at all recalling Katie excepting the colour of his eyes. It made Jeanie very

happy to see the pleasure and pride which his father by degrees began to take in his progress. And though, having nursed younger brothers and sisters ever since she could carry them, she ought to know better, Jeanie is as firmly convinced as most young mothers that her first-born is not to be equalled—far less surpassed—in the world of babies.

Of course he is a great object of delight and pride to his maternal grandmother, and Uncle Sandy, and Uncle Patie, and the younger uncles and aunt: an object also of somewhat envious admiration to Helen Grant and her husband, who have no child, but live a peaceful, if secluded and monotonous, life together at their little station among the hills.

Horace Penreath has quite settled down with his young wife at their little northern parsonage, and tries conscientiously to do his duty by his handful of parishioners as much as in him lies: though it is to be doubted whether his interest in such four-footed, winged, or finned parishioners as may come in his way has as yet abated. He usually manages to get a holiday and to get away to Strathkessachie for “the twelfth”—a very red-letter day in his calendar.

Aunt Annie lives very happily at Strathkessachie, between her little cottage and the “auld hoose” where she served so faithfully of old. She is a favourite rather than otherwise with the English servants, as she knows her own place thoroughly and never presumes on her position in the family. Leslie and Jeanie have

coaxed her down to pay them a visit ; and she rejoices exceedingly in her renewed title to the name of Grannie, and in the fact that her beloved son has at length, in her estimation, a wife and a child worthy of him, and likely to be something more than an anxiety and care.

As time goes on, Jeanie learns more and more to value in her husband the qualities which had won her esteem in her cousin ; and to feel the truth of old Mr. Fyffe's words, spoken to her when he first greeted her as a bride at Abermurchie : " I am sure it is no empty form to congratulate you, Jeanie. I have known your husband, man and boy, for some five-and-twenty years ; and I can truly say in all my experience I never knew a better Christian than Leslie Esslemont."

THE END.

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